



**NATIONAL TRIBAL**   
**CHILD WELFARE CENTER**  
FOR INNOVATION AND ADVANCEMENT

# The Cost of Caring, Part 1: Learning About Ourselves, Others, and the Services We Provide

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National Tribal Child Welfare Center for Innovation and Advancement

# Tech Housekeeping

Q&A for questions

Chat for support



# Today's Agenda

- Learn the distinctions between Compassion Fatigue, Vicarious Trauma, and Secondary Traumatic Stress, and how to recognize them in the workplace.
- Learn the ways in which burnout impacts clients, peers, and the children and families we serve.
- Reflect on how we may experience burnout & how it impacts our lives, workplaces, and bodies.

# Housekeeping & Group Norms

- Please take care of your personal needs.
- Please turn your phones off or place on silent/vibrate.
- Please allow for one person at a time to speak.
- Please approach disagreements with respect, which may include agreeing to disagree.
- Please let us know how we can improve.
- If at any point during this session you need help or would like to speak with a facilitator or helper privately, we are here to help & available by private chat.



# Acknowledging the Impact of Your Work

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Working in family- and child-centric systems elevates your risk of exposure to Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) - *children are in stressful or traumatic situations*

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Working with families in crisis requires empathy - *"Listening exposes professionals to traumatic experiences"*

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Many professionals wrestle with their own primary trauma

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Individuals in helping professions often empathetically *"put others' needs ahead of their own"*



# Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)

*“The natural and consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other (or client); the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person.” - Figley, C. 1995*

Secondary Traumatic Stress is the emotional distress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another.

For individuals who are exposed repeatedly to hearing traumatic situations/experiences of others, it can take an emotional toll.

STS symptoms can range from mild to severe, at which point individuals can develop Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Cuellar, R., Hendriks, A., Clarke, M., Sprang, G., & the NCTSN Secondary Traumatic Stress Collaborative Group (2021). *Secondary Traumatic Stress: Understanding the Impact on Professionals in Trauma-Exposed Workplaces*. Los Angeles, CA and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress

# Physical Symptoms of STS

Exhaustion

Headaches

Sleep Issues  
(insomnia)

Digestive  
Problems

Muscle Pain

Increased  
Heart Rate

Shortness of  
Breath

Weakened  
Immune  
System

Frequent  
Illness

# The Reality of Secondary Traumatic Stress

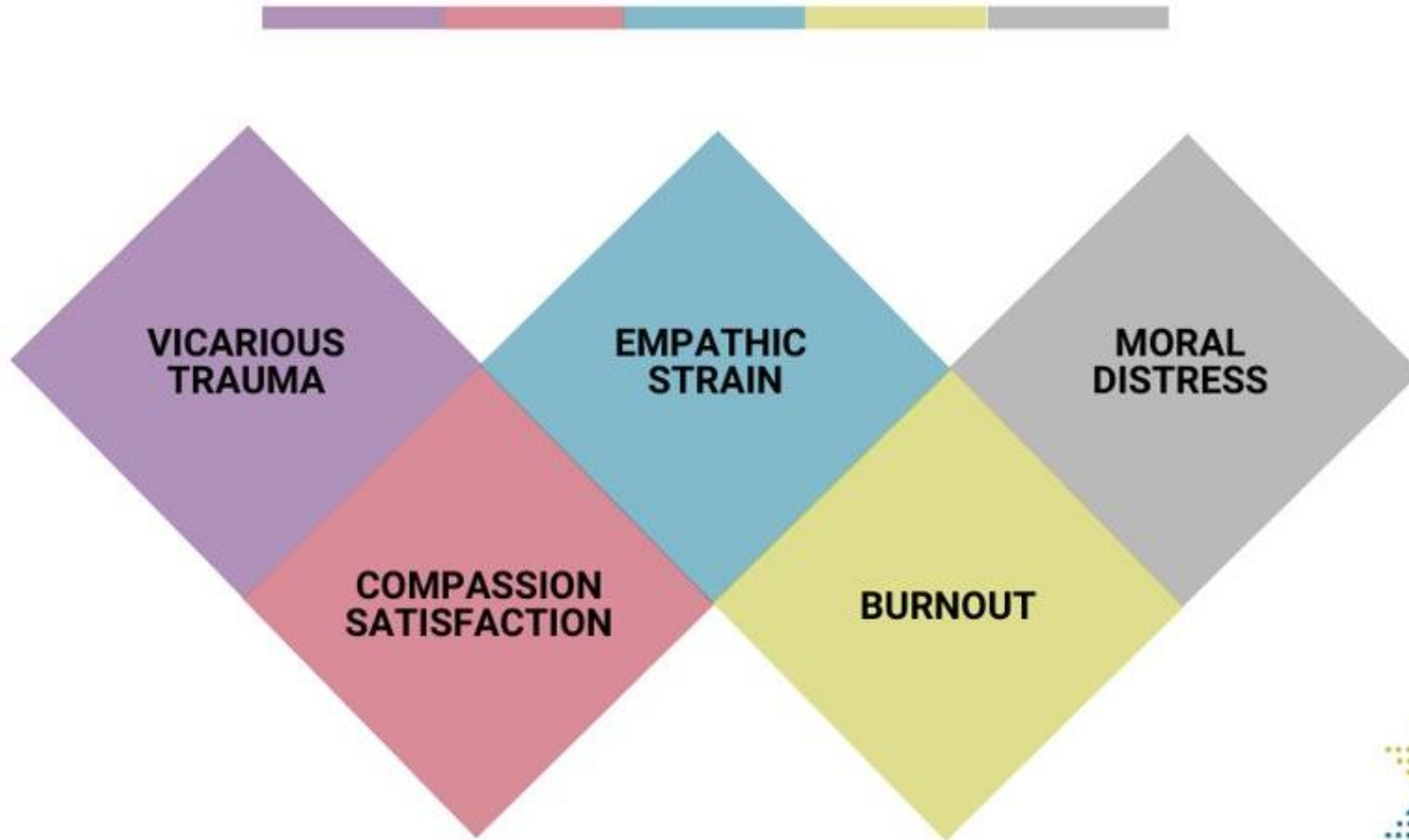
A hand is shown reaching down towards a body of water at sunset. The hand is positioned as if about to touch the water, and its reflection is visible in the calm surface below. The background features a sunset over a body of water with hills in the distance.

"The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily, and not be touched by it, is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet."

*-Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D.  
1996*

# SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS

(co-existing conditions)



# Vicarious Trauma

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“...the profound shift in world view that occurs in helping professionals when they work with individuals who have experienced trauma: helpers notice that their fundamental beliefs about the world are altered and possibly damaged by being repeatedly exposed to traumatic material.”

*-Pearlman and Saakvitne, 1995*







# Moral Distress

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"Stress that occurs when one believes they know the right thing to do, but for whatever reasons, whether it is institutional or other constraints, make it difficult to pursue the desired course of action."

*-Jameton, 1984*

# Compassion Satisfaction

Positive aspects of your work, such as believing in the work and feeling satisfied and proud to be able to help others is referred to as compassion satisfaction.



A woman with long dark hair, wearing a brown jacket over a white top, is sitting at a desk. She has her eyes closed and her hand pressed against her forehead, appearing stressed or exhausted. In front of her is a laptop. To the left, there is a white mug and a black object, possibly a calculator or a small device. The background is a blurred office setting.

# Burnout

Burnout is not a trauma condition but often the result of a high workload with minimal support tools and too few resources.

*" It is a malady that spreads gradually and continuously over time, putting people into a downward spiral. "*

*Maslach & Leiter, 2008*

# Burnout

A state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion brought on by prolonged or repeated stress

1. Emotional, Mental, Physical Exhaustion
2. Loss of Empathy (Depersonalization)
3. Loss of Personal Achievement



# What We Know About Burnout

## Who is Most at Risk?

**Age:** Younger employees seem to experience more burnout than older employees. Newer employees are also more likely to burnout.

**Marital Status:** Married people have lower scores on burnout assessments than single people.

**Social Support:** People who perceive higher levels of support from coworkers, family, and friends are buffered from burnout.

**Personality:** Neuroticism and extraversion are the personality traits most likely to experience burnout.

**Trauma Survivors:** People who have experience significant personal, or secondary trauma are more likely to experience burnout.

# What We Know About Burnout

## Workplace Contributing Factors

- **Role conflict** – When conflicting demands are put on the worker
- **Role ambiguity** – Confusion over the worker’s responsibilities, rights, and obligations
- **Unmanageable workloads**- both number of cases and capacity needed to handle cases.
- **Poor quality of coworker interactions**- both negative and lack of positive exchanges
- **Poor quality of supervisor interactions**- both negative and lack of positive exchanges
- **Inadequate staffing, training, supervision and support**

# What We Know About Burnout

## Societal Contributing Factors

Lack of respect from society and other professionals

Poor compensation, poor working conditions, inadequate training, support, and supervision

Lack of policy support from policy makers

Lack of appreciation, knowledge about what you do

Adversarial relationships with clients and others involved in the client's cases

Decreased interest in the field, harder to hire and keep workers, high turnover

# Large Group Discussion: Personal

What does burnout look like to you personally?  
(Emotionally, Physically, Mentally)

What are the signs you begin to see when  
you know you need to reach out for help?

# Large Group Discussion: Workplace

What are warning signs you begin to see at work that let you know morale is low?

Name one strategy that a current or past employer has done to help manage burnout in your workplace.

# Large Group Discussion: Children & Families

How does our burnout impact the children and families we serve?





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Our brains are wired for survival.

The anger and exhaustion we experience during burnout are signals that should tell us that change is needed.

Self-care is not selfish, but rather a matter of survival, retention, and necessary to showing up in a Good Way for children and families

# Connecting to Compassion Satisfaction

Visit with a coworker about the following:

- What parts of the work remind you of your "Why" you chose this profession?
- What is a skill(s) that you've developed in this this work that helps you help others?
- Discuss a recent situation where you believe the work you did made a difference for a child, parent, or family you were working with.



# Maslach's Three Burnout Categories

1. Emotional, Mental, Physical Exhaustion
2. Loss of Empathy (Depersonalization)
3. Loss of Personal Achievement



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# Your Feedback is Valuable!

<https://s.zoom.us/j/91987654321>



# Final Considerations: Compassion Satisfaction

Visit with a coworker about the following:

- What parts of the work remind you of your “WHY” you started in this profession?
- What is a skill(s) that you’ve developed in this work that you believe helps you in this job?
- Discuss a recent situation where you believe the work you did made a positive difference for the child, family you were working with.





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# Save-The-Date

## Part 2: Putting Lessons into Practice

January 21, 2026

2:00 – 3:00 EST

[https://maine.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_cdVPJIAoRr6dVHVpt-U1rg](https://maine.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_cdVPJIAoRr6dVHVpt-U1rg)

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- Zerden, L. de S. (2024). Social Work and burnout: Everything, everywhere, all at once. *Social Work*, 69(3), 218-219. DOI:10.1093/sw/swae021.

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