



Secondary Traumatic Stress Core Competencies for Trauma-Informed Support and Supervision: Cross-Disciplinary Version

COMPANION DOCUMENT: STRATEGIES AND RESOURCES TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION OF SUPERVISOR COMPETENCIES

This companion document to the Cross-Disciplinary Version of the STS Core Competencies for Trauma-Informed Support and Supervision offers further explanation, examples, and strategies for each benchmark. Supervisors can use this document to support their own growth and help put these competencies into action. There is also a list of supportive resources at the end of this document that offers further learning opportunities and more concrete strategies.

COMPETENCY

1

Secondary Traumatic Stress-Informed Supervisors in any discipline will have:

Knowledge of the signs, symptoms, and risk factors of STS and support options for team members.

Secondary Traumatic Stress-Informed Supervisors will:

BENCHMARK

EXPLANATION AND STRATEGIES

1 Recognize the signs of STS in team members.

Signs of STS may include:

- Unwanted thoughts or reminders: nightmares, unwanted memories or flashbacks of client's trauma experiences
- Avoidance of things or people that are reminders of the traumatic experiences of others: isolating from peers and supports, avoiding certain cases, not showing up to work
- Changes in thinking: having negative expectations, exaggerated blame of self or others
- Changes in feeling: feeling negative all the time, unable to experience positive emotions, feeling isolated
- Changes in reactions: being irritable, jumpy, quick to anger, difficulty sleeping, trouble concentrating

**BENCHMARK****EXPLANATION AND STRATEGIES**

2 Describe STS-informed services and support options that are available, accessible, and culturally relevant, including formal and informal supports, both internal and external to the organization.

Formal supports may include:

- Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)
- Mental health/substance abuse benefits and services
- Paid time off
- Regular supervision and/or consultation
- Peer support/mentorship programs
- Wellness programs/initiatives
- Training on STS and resilience
- Changes in job role or assignments

Informal supports may include talking with peers, mentorship, time with friends/family/pets, and community resources (e.g., recreational, spiritual).

Not every agency will offer these services, and not every team member will have access to these supports, so it is important to focus on what is available.

3 Help people struggling with STS access and make consistent use of services and supports in a non-judgmental way.

Encourage use of services and supports by:

- Normalizing the use of STS supports as an expected part of doing trauma work.
- Informing team members of available services regularly.
- Assisting team members to connect with services as needed (e.g., offer to make first call with them, offer private office space to make call during work hours).
- Supervisors setting an example by using services and support and sharing positive experiences with team members.

**BENCHMARK****EXPLANATION AND STRATEGIES**

4 Act as an advocate within the organization for STS supports, training, and resources that can address the impact of STS and that are accessible and culturally relevant for all team members; call attention to policies or practices that may be contributing to STS.

Educate administrators and decision-makers about STS. The resource list at the end of this document includes resources you can share to support your education and advocacy efforts.

Advocate with administrators to regularly review, assess, and expand the availability, accessibility, and quality of formal services and supports that the agency offers. The Secondary Traumatic Stress Informed Organization Assessment Tool (STSI-OA) is a freely available organizational assessment tool at <https://www.uky.edu/ctac/stsioa>. In addition, you can find examples of services and supports that agencies can offer in Benchmark 1.2 above.

Advocate changing policies and practices that may contribute to or intensify STS reactions, such as work conditions, caseloads, on-call expectations, policies/norms around leave time, and inadequate resources.

5 Identify how culture, race, gender, other identities, lived experiences, systemic oppression, and implicit bias may impact the way STS affects individuals and organizations.

People of color and those who hold marginalized identities may have additional vulnerabilities to STS due to:

- Exposure to the same oppression and institutional racism as client populations
- Identification with clients of a similar background or with similar experiences
- Lack of safety or support in their agency
- Higher caseloads and being asked to take on additional responsibilities, such as translation or contributing expertise about race and marginalized identities

Reflect on how these dynamics might be relevant to your own work experience and for team members. Consider whether there are organizational norms, practices, and/or policies that you could be a part of shifting to minimize additional stressors related to these intersections (e.g., assigning higher caseloads and/or added responsibilities).



COMPETENCY

2

Secondary Traumatic Stress-Informed Supervisors in any discipline will have:

Knowledge and ability to self-assess, monitor, and address their own STS.

Secondary Traumatic Stress-Informed Supervisors will:

BENCHMARK

EXPLANATION AND STRATEGIES

1 Recognize how culture, race, gender, other identities, lived experiences, systemic oppression, and implicit bias may affect themselves, their own experiences of STS, and their supervisory relationships and practice.

Reflect upon the following questions:

- How have culture, race, historical trauma, systemic oppression, and/or implicit bias impacted you and your response to work-related trauma exposure?
- In what ways are you similar to your team members and in what ways are you different?
- How do these differences impact your relationships and interactions with team members?
- Have you assumed similarities or differences that may not be present based on external factors (e.g., both of you are of the same racial category or similar educational background)?
- What are some strategies for addressing these differences?

Build intentional self-awareness regarding implicit biases and issues of privilege and oppression. One helpful tool for building your own awareness is the “Self-Assessment of Culture in Regard to Privilege: Hot Spots, Hidden Spots, and Soft Spots”, which is freely available at <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/self-assessment-of-culture-in-regards-to-privilege-hot-spots-hidden-spots-and-soft-spots>.

Directly address diversity factors that may be crucial in terms of establishing trust in the supervisory process. “How to Talk Effectively About Racism” by Kenneth Hardy is a useful resource to build your own skills for having these discussions and is freely available at <https://traumatransformed.org/documents/Effectively-Talk-About-Race-Dr.-Ken-Hardy-11x17.pdf>.

2 Regularly assess how STS may be affecting their own functioning.

Create opportunities to slow down and reflect on your wellness and functioning (e.g., physical health, emotional wellbeing, quality of sleep, satisfaction in your work).

The resource list at the end of this document includes formal STS assessments, including a free app.



BENCHMARK

EXPLANATION AND STRATEGIES

3

Seek to address STS when it starts to impact their personal and/or work life.

Strategies to address STS include:

- Practicing mindfulness and relaxation exercises
- Allowing yourself to feel a wide range of feelings (rather than avoiding feelings) without judgment
- Changing negative thinking patterns
- Appreciating what is good and how you positively impact the families you work with and the community where you are
- Taking breaks during the workday
- Maintaining healthy boundaries between professional and personal life
- Building healthy support systems inside and outside of work

4

Actively seek support from other team members, their own supervisor, and/or other professional supports.

Sources of support for supervisors may include:

- Reaching out to your own supervisor or other organizational leadership.
- Accessing Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) or other therapy services.
- Connecting with peers and enhance peer support, within your agency and with others in your field outside your agency
- Advocating for your needs to your supervisor and to leadership

Remember that asking for help when you need it is a sign of strength.

5

Model and engage in self-care practices and promote opportunities for team members to participate when possible.

Promote and encourage self-care by:

- Asking team members to join you for a break or a walk.
- Building relaxation and/or mindfulness activities into team meetings.
- Encouraging team members not to work on their days off and modeling it yourself (e.g., arranging coverage at work, not participating in calls or checking/sending emails).
- Encouraging team members to schedule leave days and modeling by announcing planned leave.



COMPETENCY

3

Secondary Traumatic Stress-Informed Supervisors in any discipline will have:

Knowledge and ability to help team members safely share the emotional experience of working with people impacted by trauma.

Secondary Traumatic Stress-Informed Supervisors will:

BENCHMARK

EXPLANATION AND STRATEGIES

1 Work to enhance emotional safety when meeting with team members.

Strategies to enhance emotional safety during meetings include:

- Ensuring physical safety
- Being aware of potential threats to emotional safety (e.g., trauma reminders or discrimination)
- Paying attention to group dynamics and safety in group supervision
- Holding consistent and predictable meetings, related to both schedule and content
- Minimizing distractions and multitasking
- Accepting team members non-judgmentally
- Making decisions with your team members instead of mandating next steps when possible
- Acknowledging your mistakes
- Modeling curiosity by asking questions about team members' experiences and reactions
- Making time for debriefing and calming activity when emotions are high

2 Use active listening skills to help understand and validate team members' experiences.

Active or reflective listening is a communication strategy that involves seeking to understand the speaker's true message (attending to words, tone of voice, body language, etc.) and then offering the understood message back to the speaker to confirm that the message has been understood correctly. Reflective listening also attends to the feelings being communicated by the speaker.

The resource list at the end of this document includes resources to learn more about reflective supervision and listening.

**BENCHMARK****EXPLANATION AND STRATEGIES**

3 Identify and build on team members' strengths to help increase their self-awareness, competence, and resilience.

The Strengths-Based Supervision website is a helpful resource for building this skill: <http://strengthsbasedsupervision.com>.

4 Discuss and normalize common emotional responses to working with people impacted by trauma.

Strategies for normalizing common emotional responses to trauma work include:

- Identifying and sharing emotional responses you have experienced
- Describing common reactions you have observed in others
- Referring to fact sheets, research articles, and other STS resources that list common responses
- Emphasizing that these are normal and expected responses to an abnormal event which is an occupational hazard and in no way suggests anything wrong with the team member for having these responses

5 Provide consistent emotional support to team members, considering their individual needs, histories, identities, and experience.

Strategies for providing emotional support include:

- Validating and normalizing their feelings and responses
- Expressing empathy
- Allowing expression of emotions and sitting with the team member in the emotion
- Thanking the team member for sharing
- Calling attention to team member's strengths in coping with the situation
- Asking if there is anything the supervisor can do to provide additional support



COMPETENCY

4

Secondary Traumatic Stress-Informed Supervisors in any discipline will have:

Ability to support the resilience of team members, individually and collectively.

Secondary Traumatic Stress-Informed Supervisors will:

BENCHMARK

EXPLANATION AND STRATEGIES

1 Notice and encourage when team members are using their understanding of trauma to be more effective in their role. Help them recognize their growing expertise

Share resources about trauma and its impact on child and family behavior, using resources such as “The 12 Core Concepts: Concepts for Understanding Traumatic Stress Responses in Children and Families”, which is freely available at: <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/12-core-concepts-concepts-understanding-traumatic-stress-responses-children-and-families>.

Help team members identify and use effective skills to manage trauma reactions in children and families.

Recognize, point out, and encourage when team members use these skills and/or show improvement in their ability to address trauma with children and families.

2 Identify and develop team member’s strengths and help apply those strengths to job-related activities.

Prompts to help team members identify and use their strengths include:

- Describe a time when you were able to overcome or handle a major challenge in life.
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What personal strengths did you draw upon?
- How might you apply this strength now?

3 Offer opportunities for team members to connect with their team and other professional supports, in order to guard against isolation and develop a sense of shared responsibility to address difficult circumstances.

Strategies for creating and maintaining a caring community include:

- Enhancing emotional safety within the team
- Fostering positive communication and conflict resolution skills
- Encouraging peer support

Help team members identify sources of team support and/or mentorship.

Encourage “accountability partners”: colleagues who collaborate to set and achieve wellness goals and support and encourage each other.

**BENCHMARK****EXPLANATION AND STRATEGIES**

4a Promote the development of compassion satisfaction by supporting acceptance of the complexity of the work and the things that cannot be changed.

Strategies for normalizing common emotional responses to trauma work include:

- What can you do within the scope of your role?
- What can we do together to respond to this complex situation?
- What are some of the factors that are beyond your control?
- What can you do or say to yourself to cope with factors that are beyond your control?

4b Promote the development of compassion satisfaction by helping team members recognize partial successes, their professional growth, and their increased skill levels.

Questions that can help recognize successes and growth include:

- What are the gains that have been made?
- Can you tell me one thing that is going well with this family or situation?
- What is something you learned from this situation?
- What is something you have done that has made a positive difference for this child and family?
- What about this child or family inspires you?

4c Promote the development of compassion satisfaction by engaging team members in creating a practice of noticing, acknowledging, and savoring positive moments within their role and the impact of their work.

Questions that can help create a practice of savoring positive moments and impact include:

- What was the best part of my day today, and who or what made it the best part?
- What did this teach me?
- What am I most proud of today?
- Where do I find meaning and purpose in my work?

**BENCHMARK****EXPLANATION AND STRATEGIES**

4d Promote the development of compassion satisfaction by reinforcing the benefits of engaging in restorative activities at work and off hours.

Integrate relaxation and mindfulness activities into group and individual supervision sessions.

Role model and encourage self-care during and after work:

- Taking breaks
- Walking with a partner
- Encouraging moments of laughter and gratitude
- Using mindfulness, relaxation, stretching, and/or physical exercise
- Sharing of favorite hobbies
- Helping team member create a wellness plan:
 - What will you do during work?
 - What will you do after work?
 - What can I or the team do to support your plan?



Key Resources to Support Supervisors' Growth:

Websites

1. National Child Traumatic Stress Network Secondary Traumatic Stress resources: <https://www.nctsn.org/trauma-informed-care/secondary-traumatic-stress>
2. Secondary Traumatic Stress Innovations and Solutions Center: <https://www.uky.edu/ctac/stsisc>
3. Secondary Traumatic Stress Consortium: <https://www.stsconsortium.com/>
4. Southern Regional Child Advocacy Center's STS Resources and Tools: <https://www.srcac.org/reflect-refuel-reset/>
5. Strengths-Based Supervision: <http://strengthsbasedsupervision.com>
6. TEND Academy: <https://www.tendacademy.ca>
7. Trauma Stewardship Institute: <https://traumastewardship.com/>
8. University of Kentucky Center on Trauma and Children Well@Work: www.uky.edu/ctac/wellatwork

Fact Sheets

1. Secondary Traumatic Stress: A Fact Sheet for Child-Serving Professionals:
National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Secondary Traumatic Stress Committee. (2011). Secondary traumatic stress: A fact sheet for child-serving professionals. Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress. http://nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/secondary_traumatic_tress.pdf
2. How to Talk Effectively About Racism:
Hardy, K. (2015). Race Inside and Outside of Therapy Room. Psychotherapy Network Symposium. <https://traumatransformed.org/documents/Effectively-Talk-About-Race-Dr.-Ken-Hardy-11x17.pdf>
3. Secondary Trauma and Child Welfare Staff: Guidance for Supervisors and Administrators:
National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Secondary Traumatic Stress Collaborative Group. (2016). Secondary Trauma and Child Welfare Staff: Guidance for Supervisors and Administrators. Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress. http://nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/sts_cw_final.pdf
4. Secondary Traumatic Stress: A Fact Sheet for Organizations Employing Community Violence Workers:
National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Secondary Traumatic Stress Collaborative Group. (2015). Secondary traumatic stress: A fact sheet for organizations employing community violence workers. Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress. <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/secondary-traumatic-stress-fact-sheet-organizations-employing-community-violence-workers>
5. Understanding Secondary Traumatic Stress for CAC Workers:
National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Child Welfare Collaborative Group. (2017). Understanding Secondary Traumatic Stress for CAC Workers. Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress. <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/understanding-secondary-traumatic-stress-cac-workers>

Webinars and Videos

1. Estrés Traumático Secundario: Cómo Entender el Impacto que Tiene el Trabajo de Trauma en los Profesionales
<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/secondary-traumatic-stress-understanding-the-impact-of-trauma-work-on-professionals-sp>
2. Secondary Traumatic Stress: Understanding the Impact of Trauma Work on Professionals
<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/secondary-traumatic-stress-understanding-the-impact-of-trauma-work-on-professionals>
3. Françoise Mathieu- The Edge of Compassion: <https://youtu.be/lcaUA6A37q8>



Individual and Organizational Assessments

1. Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL): Measure available at: <https://proqol.org/proqol-measure> (available in multiple languages)
2. Self-Assessment of Culture in Regard to Privilege: Hot Spots, Hidden Spots, and Soft Spots: <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/self-assessment-of-culture-in-regards-to-privilege-hot-spots-hidden-spots-and-soft-spots>
3. Secondary Traumatic Stress Informed Organizational Assessment (STSI-OA): <https://www.uky.edu/ctac/stsioa>

Workbook

1. What About You? A Workbook for Those Who Work with Others: Volk, K.T., Guarino, K., Edson Grandin, M., & Clervil, R. (2008). *What About You? A Workbook for Those Who Work with Others. The National Center on Family Homelessness.* <http://508.center4si.com/SelfCareforCareGivers.pdf>

Articles

1. Mindful Practices to Enhance Diversity-Informed Reflective Supervision and Leadership: Clark, R., Gehl, M., Heffron, M.C., Kerr, M., Soliman, S., Shahmoon-Shanok, R., Thomas, K. (2019). *Mindful Practices to Enhance Diversity-Informed Reflective Supervision and Leadership. Zero to Three.* <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3010-mindful-practices-to-enhance-diversity-informed-reflective-supervision-and-leadership#:~:text=Mindfulness%20practice%20provides%20tools%20that,limits%20of%20their%20comfort%20zone>.
2. The Psychology of Radical Healing: Neville, H.A., Adames, H.Y., Chavez-Dueñas, N.Y., Chen, G.A., French, B.H., Lewis, J.A., & Mosley, D.V. (2019). *The Psychology of Radical Healing. Psychology Today.* <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/healing-through-social-justice/201903/the-psychology-radical-healing>
3. Hernández, P., & McDowell, T. (2010). Intersectionality, power, and relational safety in context: Key concepts in clinical supervision. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*, 4(1), 29–35. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017064>
4. Noroña, C.R., Heffron, M.C., Grunstein, S., & Nalo, A. (2012). Broadening the Scope: Next Steps in Reflective Supervision Training. *Zero to Three*, 33, 29-34.
5. Sandeen, E., Moore, K.M., and Swanda, R.M. (2018). Reflective Local Practice: A pragmatic framework for improving culturally competent practice in psychology. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 19(2), 142-150. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pro0000183>

Guidelines

1. Secondary Traumatic Stress in Child Welfare Practice: Trauma Informed Guidelines for Organizations *The Center for Child Welfare Trauma-Informed Policies, Programs, and Practices and O'Malley-Laursen, A. (2021). Secondary traumatic stress in child welfare practice: Trauma-informed guidelines for organizations: Second edition. San Diego, CA: Chadwick Center for Children and Families.* <https://www.actsproject.com/public/uploads/ckeditor/6273f7cd725aa1651767245.pdf>
2. Reflective Supervision Guidelines: Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health. *Reflective Supervision Guidelines.* <https://macmh.org/programs/iec/macmh-iec-professional-endorsement/guidelines-reflective-supervision/>

STS Trainings and Curricula

1. Secondary Traumatic Stress: Understanding the Impact on Professionals in Trauma-Exposed Workplaces: Cuellar, R., Hendricks, A., Clarke, M., Sprang, G., & the NCTSN Secondary Traumatic Stress Collaborative Group. (2022). *Secondary Traumatic Stress: Understanding the Impact on Professionals in Trauma-Exposed Workplaces.* Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress. <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/secondary-traumatic-stress-understanding-the-impact-on-professionals-in-trauma-exposed-workplaces>
2. Staying Inside the Window of Tolerance: An Advanced Training on STS and Resiliency: University of Kentucky Center on Trauma and Children Secondary Traumatic Stress Innovations and Solutions Center. (2022). *Staying Inside the Window of Tolerance: An Advanced Training on STS and Resiliency.* <https://www.uky.edu/ctac/wotonline>