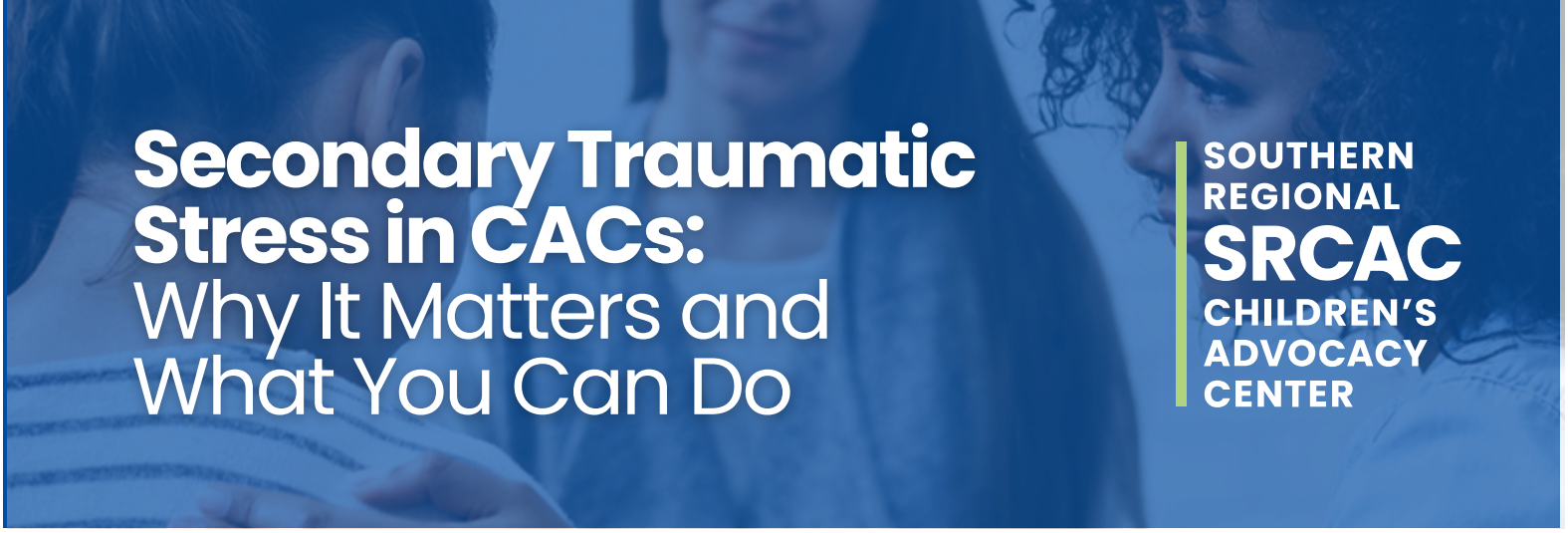


Secondary Traumatic Stress in CACs: Why It Matters and What You Can Do

SOUTHERN REGIONAL SRCAC CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTER

STS Overview and Impact on CAC Staff

CAC work, which focuses on helping child victims of abuse and other crimes, inherently exposes CAC professionals to trauma. This exposure puts CAC professionals at risk for secondary traumatic stress (STS)—the emotional distress that can occur when an individual hears about another person's firsthand experiences of trauma or is repeatedly exposed to trauma-related details, images, or reactions associated with trauma.

Investing in STS prevention and response is a **strategic decision**. It protects your workforce, improves outcomes for children and families, and strengthens the long-term sustainability of your CAC.

protects workforce

improves outcomes

strengthens sustainability

What happens when STS is left *unaddressed*?

When left unaddressed, STS reactions can lead to impairments in personal and professional functioning and can impact the morale and functioning of the CAC. The organizational effects of STS include the following:

- decreased efficiency;
- increased employee turnover;
- decreased provider decision-making and service delivery; and
- poor working environments that, in turn, reduce morale and increase absenteeism even for employees not directly impacted by STS.

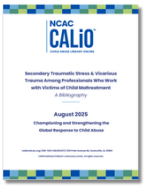
Where can I learn more?

Explore these trusted resources to deepen your understanding and begin implementing STS-informed practices:

Build your *foundational knowledge* first

- National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) offers a wide range of free resources, including fact sheets, toolkits, webinars, and online courses for professionals supporting children and families.

- Reflect, Refuel, Reset. STS video series featuring a Q&A with experts on the impact of STS on professionals and organizations.



Recommended reading:

Secondary Traumatic Stress and Vicarious Trauma Among Professionals Who Work with Victims of Child Maltreatment NCAC CALIO™ Bibliography

Turn Knowledge Into Action

Here are some simple, meaningful actions you can take right away to begin addressing the impact of STS. Start with these actionable strategies:

- **Minimize graphic details** when discussing cases
  - Low Impact Debriefing
- **Evaluate** the degree to which your organization is STS informed
  - University of Kentucky's STS-Informed Organization Assessment
- **Integrate STS education** into onboarding for staff and MDT members
  - Understanding STS for CAC Workers
- **Monitor STS levels** confidentially and without stigma
  - Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale
  - Professional Quality of Life Scale
- **Encourage** enhanced peer support
  - Well@Work Podcast: Listen to Episode 4, "Creating Peer Networks of Support."
- **Implement wellness policies**, including mental health days and adequate time off
  - Secondary Traumatic Stress Policy Analysis Tool

OJJDP Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

This project was supported by Grant #15PJDP-25-GK-01848-JJVO awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.

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