



POLICY TITLE:		Support and Intervention for Primary and Secondary Traumatic Stress (P/STS) in the CFSA Workforce	
 		CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES AGENCY	
Approved By:	Date Approved:	Original Effective Date:	Last Revision:
Robert L. Matthews	October 1, 2021	N/A	N/A

I. AUTHORITY	The Director of the Child and Family Services Agency (“CFSA” or “Agency”) adopts this policy to be consistent with the Agency’s mission, and applicable federal and District of Columbia laws and regulations including D.C. Code §§ 1-601.01 <i>et seq.</i> , and D.C. Mun Regs. Subt.6-B, Chapters B12, B13, and B-20.
II. APPLICABILITY	This policy applies to all Agency employees and contracted Agency personnel.
III. RATIONALE	<p>It is important for child welfare organizations to be trauma-informed, with a clear understanding of the role that violence and trauma have on both the lives of the individuals they serve, and also on their staff.</p> <p>Frontline staff in child welfare may be subjected to a range of personal safety or health risks during the performance of their professional duties and responsibilities. Directly, experiencing a traumatic event or working with children and families who have experienced significant trauma may result in Primary or Secondary Traumatic Stress (P/STS) for these staff.</p> <p>CFSA seeks to address staff safety, health and well-being through well-formed policies and substantive services. Such services shall provide consistent and meaningful opportunities to recognize, address, mitigate, or at least minimize P/STS and maintain professional competency among staff.</p>
IV. POLICY	<p>It is the policy of CFSA to promote and provide a safe and secure work environment for staff.</p> <p>CFSA shall provide frontline staff and their immediate supervisors with periodic safety, crisis response, and other trauma-informed training that equips them with the skills and competencies needed to keep themselves, their colleagues, and their clients safe.</p> <p>CFSA shall also provide resources and supports to staff who have experienced (P/STS) in the course of their work duties, to mitigate the personal and professional impact.</p>
V. CONTENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Definitions of Primary and Secondary Traumatic Stress B. Safety in the Field C. Safety in the Office D. Summary of P/STS Resources for CFSA Employees E. Uniform Response to P/STS F. Trauma-Informed Engagement of Applicants and New Hires G. CFSA P/STS Working Group

<p>SECTIONS</p>	<p>Section A: Definitions of Primary and Secondary Traumatic Stress (P/STS)</p> <p>Primary traumatic stress can occur upon direct experience or observation of a disturbing or distressing event, or upon learning about it afterwards.</p> <p>Secondary traumatic stress can occur when working with an individual or group that has been traumatized by a disturbing or distressing event. In addition, direct or indirect exposure to events that are reminiscent of difficult experiences endured in one’s personal life may produce traumatic stress.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Such events, which are often described as “triggers” could include, for example: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. The death of a child, parent, kin, or resource parent on a case currently or previously assigned to a staff member. b. A threat to staff from a client or client’s family member. c. An environmental threat in the field (such as gunfire or witnessing physical violence). d. Providing or observing disturbing or emotional testimony in the Family Court. e. A difficult home removal or placement disruption in which the child’s or family’s response is highly distressed. f. Any other highly stressful event that occurs while staff act in a professional capacity that may impede their ability to complete ongoing professional duties. 2. The symptoms of P/STS that can impact the affected individual’s cognitive, behavioral, emotional, or physical well-being may include, but are not limited to the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Feelings of isolation, guilt, or apathy b. Anxiety c. Hypervigilance d. Low productivity e. Increased absenteeism f. Physical ailments g. Sleep disturbances h. Confusion i. Helplessness j. Such symptoms can be addressed, and possibly mitigated, if attended to proactively.
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Section B: Safety in the Field

CFSA's commitment to promoting and providing a safe and secure work environment includes activities conducted in the field on behalf of the Agency. To support staff safety in the field, the following measures shall be taken:

1. **Transfer of safety-related information.** At the time a case is received, the transmitting worker shall brief the receiving worker on potential safety-related issues with the child and family, including, but not limited to:
 - a. The physical environment(s) where client contact may occur.
 - b. Clients' behaviors or personal circumstances.
 - c. The transmitting worker's emotional response to the environment and circumstances.
2. **Supervisory consultation.** Prior to conducting client contacts in the field, staff and their supervisor shall take a joint inventory of safety factors such as those listed above and determine whether the client contact may put the staff at increased risk for P/STS. Such consultation is especially important on new clients or on those for whom challenges have been previously identified.
3. **Accompaniment.** If it is determined that the level of P/STS risk is concerning, staff may request an accompaniment. Such a request, either verbally or in writing, shall be made to a supervisor with as much advance notice as possible. For example,
 - a. For concerns about risks involving physical safety, an accompaniment by the Metropolitan Police Department may be arranged.
 - b. For concerns about risks involving emotional safety, an accompaniment by a CFSA colleague or supervisor may be arranged.
 - c. The supervisor or manager shall make reasonable efforts to accommodate an accompaniment request when the assessed circumstances warrant approval. If an accompanying resource is not available, the temporary postponing of a non-emergency contact may be made.
 - d. While rare, if there are concerns of danger, there is no accompaniment available and the contact cannot be postponed, the supervisor should call 911 to request that MPD conduct a welfare check (i.e., make the contact).

	<p>4. Other Safety Planning. Prior to conducting any visit in the field, staff shall ensure that their supervisor or program manager has their contact information, contact schedule, the address or location of contacts, and the individuals to be seen. If needed, staff and their manager can establish a communication action plan (e.g., supervisory outreach after a certain amount of time has passed without communication) while the staff member is in the field.</p> <p>5. Badges. Staff performing official duties in the field shall carry their formal Agency identification badges on their person at all times. Badges shall be displayed, as needed, during initial contacts and scheduled visits with individuals who will be seen by staff. Badges are not required to be visible at all times.</p> <p>6. Reporting. Safety incidents shall be reported to immediate supervisors as soon as it is safe to do so following an incident. For safety incidents involving children and youth currently in care, staff shall follow established Agency reporting protocols. (See Critical Events policy and Unusual Incidents related to Children or Youth administrative issuance).</p>
	<p>Section C: Safety in the Office</p> <p>CFSA’s commitment to promoting and providing a safe and secure work environment for staff includes activities conducted in any of the Agency’s buildings. To facilitate a safe environment, and support staff in CFSA’s offices, the following measures should be taken:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Supervisory consultation. Prior to hosting or facilitating client contacts or meetings in the office, staff shall alert their supervisor as well as the building’s security team of any potential risks or concerns that could arise. 2. Accompaniment or other supports. Staff can and should also request support when they have concerns about their safety or well-being. Supervisors shall identify and provide resources, such as: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Helping to arrange an alternative location for the contact to ensure greater security presence, i.e., either in a specific area within the building or in a different building. b. Arranging for the accompaniment of a colleague. c. Arranging for security presence in, or around, the room during the contact, as post orders allow. 3. Reporting. Safety incidents shall be reported to immediate supervisors as soon as it is safe to do so following an incident. For safety incidents involving children and youth currently in care, staff shall follow established Agency reporting protocols. (See Critical Events policy and Unusual Incidents related to Children or Youth administrative issuance).

Section D: Summary of P/STS Resources for CFSA Employees

To support staff members who are at risk of, or have experienced, trauma or other emotional challenges in the course of their work, the Agency makes a variety of support resources available on an on-going basis. These include:

1. **External support.** Through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or the employee’s private insurance, employees can engage with a therapeutic service provider. CFSA’s Wellness Coordinator is available to support this connection.
2. **Internal support.** With the support and referral of a supervisor or the Program Administrator for the Child Welfare Training Academy, employees can access 1:1 therapeutic support through CFSA’s contracted resource.
3. **Group support.** Employees can participate in group support sessions offered through the Child Welfare Training Academy or the Agency’s contracted P/STS resource.
4. **Wellness program.** Employees can take advantage of a multi-faceted wellness program managed by the Agency’s Human Resources Administration, featuring resources and activities to support stress reduction, prevent health risks and promote self-care.
5. **Training.** Recognizing the importance of psychoeducation in addressing primary and secondary trauma, the Child Welfare Training Academy (CWTA) will make training available to all CFSA staff on the signs and symptoms of P/STS, ways to mitigate these symptoms, and strategies for addressing P/STS.

Section E: Uniform Response to P/STS

CFSA shall utilize a standard response for staff who experience a triggering event or P/STS (as defined in Section A) in the conduct of their official duties.

1. **Reporting.** Staff who experience a P/STS triggering event are encouraged to notify their supervisor. Staff may also report a triggering event to CFSA’s Health and Wellness Coordinator or the Child Welfare Training Academy’s Program Administrator who can refer them for available interventions.
Note: Staff shall not be penalized or retaliated against for reporting a triggering event.
2. **Engagement.** Supervisors shall engage staff if they receive a report, observe, or have reason to believe that a triggering event has occurred. They shall make contact (in person, or by visual phone app) as soon as possible after the event, but no more than 48 hours afterwards. They are encouraged to use motivational interviewing skills to engage their staff in supportive conversation.

3. **Support.** Upon learning about a triggering event, supervisors shall discuss with their staff member the array of resources and supports available, and determine together an appropriate course of action. This may include:
- a. Increased contact or consultation with the immediate supervisor or other manager. See [HERE](#) for tips for supervisors on working with their staff on P/STS.
 - b. A trauma-informed assessment of their caseload, with adjustments made where needed and possible.
 - c. Training for the staff member on the signs and symptoms of P/STS; ways to mitigate these symptoms; and strategies for addressing P/STS.
 - d. Participation in supportive group discussion forums.
 - e. Referral to the Agency’s contracted P/STS resource for short-term, confidential, 1:1 consultation. A tip sheet for managers on using this resource can be accessed [HERE](#). A tip sheet for staff can be accessed [HERE](#).
 - f. Connection to the Agency’s Health and Wellness Coordinator who can further connect the staff member to internal or external wellness supports, such as through EAP or as offered by the staff member’s health insurance plan.
 - g. Approval of a “supportive response period” of at least two business days of administrative leave:
 - i. This leave shall go into effect as soon as reasonably possible following report by the staff member of the triggering event, or its impact.
 - ii. Supervisors must immediately alert the Human Resources Director and the Human Resources Recruitment Manager if they approve this leave.
 - iii. The supervisor (with the help of the Program Manager, as needed) shall temporarily re-assign the impacted staff member’s cases to other appropriate or similarly qualified staff.
 - iv. Following the completion of the supportive response period, staff shall resume all work responsibilities, unless CFSA’s Human Resources Administration has been provided with appropriate medical documentation indicating that the staff member is unable to return to work after the supportive response period ends.
4. **Manager training.** In addition to standard MACWS trainings (initial and the 2.0 refresher), supervisors shall receive annual training on how to identify, and communicate with, respond to, support and supervise staff who are exposed to safety or other risk-related issues while performing their duties. Supervisors will also learn about trauma-informed case assigning.

	<p>Section F: Trauma-informed Engagement of Applicants and New Hires</p> <p>CFSA shall periodically review and assess its recruitment, hiring and on-boarding processes to ensure they are trauma-informed.</p>
	<p>Section G: CFSA P/STS Working Group</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. CFSA shall maintain a cross-agency, multi-level Working Group on P/STS to make recommendations to Agency leadership on approaches to, as well as resources and activities for, reducing and mitigating P/STS in the workforce. 2. The committee shall meet according to the schedule established by its membership.