# Preventing Secondary Trauma/Burnout

Secondary trauma and burnout, both of which are conditions that many child welfare professionals face when working with child sexual abuse cases, can be prevented. Before secondary trauma or burnout occurs, the child welfare professional – for the benefit of the clients and the child welfare professional – can and must, take steps to try to ensure that neither occurs. Below are some of the ways in which the child welfare professional can avoid secondary traumatization and/or burnout. Feel free to add your own in the spaces provided.

*Preventing Secondary Trauma*:

- Self-Care through the ABCs (Awareness, Balance, and Connection):
  - Awareness:
    - Attain self-awareness and self-reflection through supervision, therapy, or personal interactions with friends and colleagues; keep a journal and take a few moments between sessions to check in with one's self
    - Conduct regular self-assessments in supervision
    - Be aware of the particular areas of their jobs that cause them the most emotional stress, such as a certain type of client victimization
    - Learn to recognize the rewards of the work, as it will help you see a fuller picture of your interventions and efforts
  - Balance:
    - Know that your work is important, but it need not be your whole life
    - Maintain healthy boundaries between work and home
    - Develop and maintain interests outside of work
    - Establish quiet time each day for reflection, which can be restorative
    - Exercise, learn to relax, and recognize the importance of taking vacations, as this will also help you stay balanced
  - Connection:
    - Perform your work with team members, as child sexual abuse work should not be done in isolation
    - Regardless of your practice setting or agency, find and maintain relationships with supportive colleagues, as this can reduce isolation and create lighter moments
    - Share positive connections with others. This can occur through formal supervision, peer groups, in-service trainings, or informally through social gatherings. Positive connections are instrumental in reminding you of the meaningful and rewarding elements of life at home and work. Seeking and nurturing supportive relationships with peers, actively engaging in supervision, and talking to friends are other avenues of connection.
- Other methods that I can use in and/or out of the office:
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  - _____

Source: Clemans, Shantih E. DSW. (2004). *Understanding vicarious traumatization: Strategies for Social Workers. Social Work Today*. Vol. 4 No. 2 p. 13. Retrieved from the World Wide Web on July 10, 2008 @ http://www.socialworktoday.com/archive/swt_0204p13.htm

# Preventing Secondary Trauma/Burnout (continued)

*Preventing Burnout*:

- The best preventive measure and remedy for burnout is collaborative work. Teamwork minimizes some of the problems that lead to burnout. In addition, teamwork allows an opportunity for sharing the pain and distress that many cases cause professionals. To facilitate teamwork:
  - Work with a partner, for example, as police officers often do
  - Work with your supervisor on case concerns
  - Share the progress of a family with a colleague
  - Consult with other experienced people either within your own agency or outside
  - Collaborate with cross-systems partners
  - Work as part of a Multidisciplinary Team
  - Use collaborative efforts such as Family Group Decision Making (FGDM)
- In addition, burnout can also be prevented when one believes and is supported in a work environment that adheres to the beliefs that:
  - Working with child sexual abuse cases, and child welfare work in general, is difficult
  - Realistic client goals must be set and modest gains appreciated
  - There is meaning and value of child welfare work in that it makes a difference and has a positive impact
  - Having effective interpersonal support systems available is important to child welfare professionals and their efforts
  - Child welfare and related work should offer a positive emotional experience
  - Working conditions should be comfortable and conducive to child welfare professional efforts to help children and families
  - The child welfare professional should be confident, believe in his/her competence, and be offered opportunities to increase that competence and confidence
  - The child welfare professional should be hopeful and have a fundamental belief that people can change and that adversity can be overcome
  - Societal efforts to reduce child sexual abuse will have a major positive impact, and child welfare professionals should want to become personally involved in that effort
- Other considerations that will help prevent burnout:
  - _____
  - _____
  - _____

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (1993). *Child sexual abuse: Intervention and treatment issues: User manual series (1993)*. Author: Faller, Kathleen Coulborn, Ph.D., A.C.S.W. Retrieved from the World Wide Web at http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/sexabuse/index.cfm