



## Secondary Traumatic Stress

Coping with the effects of others' trauma can be draining and can have lasting negative effects. It is not uncommon for educators who deal with traumatized children to develop their own symptoms of traumatic stress. This is known as secondary traumatic stress.

In order to best serve their students and maintain their own health, educators must be alert to the signs of secondary traumatic stress in themselves and their coworkers. In a trauma-informed school, staff should be encouraged to practice self-care along with other strategies to guard against or heal from the effects of secondary traumatic stress.

### Risk Factors & Causes of Secondary Traumatic Stress

Certain circumstances can cause you to be more susceptible to secondary traumatic stress. Seek support and practice self-care to manage the possible effects of these experiences:

- Personal exposure to a traumatic event(s) or to individuals who are coping with their own reactions to trauma
- Direct contact with children's traumatic stories
- Helping others and neglecting yourself

### Signs of Secondary Traumatic Stress

Secondary traumatic stress can impact all areas of your life. The effects can range from mild to debilitating. If you think you might be at risk, be alert for any of the following symptoms:

- **Emotional** – feeling numb or detached; feeling overwhelmed or maybe even hopeless.
- **Physical** – having low energy or feeling fatigued.
- **Behavioral** – changing your routine or engaging in self-destructive coping mechanisms.
- **Professional** – experiencing low performance of job tasks and responsibilities; feeling low job morale.
- **Cognitive** – experiencing confusion, diminished concentration, and difficulty with decision making; experiencing trauma imagery, which is seeing events over and over again.
- **Spiritual** – questioning the meaning of life or lacking self-satisfaction.
- **Interpersonal** – physically withdrawing or becoming emotionally unavailable to your co-workers or your family.

If you experience any of these symptoms, take steps to manage your secondary traumatic stress.

### Managing Secondary Traumatic Stress

Awareness is the key to managing secondary traumatic stress for the organization and for individuals. A school community can share information about the signs of secondary traumatic stress so staff members recognize the signs in themselves and in others.

*"Parents and teachers who take care of themselves are able to take better care of their children and students."*

–NCTSN Basic Facts About Child Trauma

*"How are we supporting teachers, recognizing that day in and day out they're interacting with tremendous pain, tremendous suffering? The stories that children bring onto campus can certainly have an impact and so trauma-informed school systems also really need to focus on being secondary-trauma-informed systems."*

–Joshua Kaufman, CBITS Trainer

*"And it wasn't that it was a panacea, but that teacher felt she wasn't alone, that there was someone who really noticed what she was struggling with. And somebody who literally walked her, took her hand and walked her in, because there's a tremendous reluctance for students or faculty to go and seek help."*

–Marleen Wong, Intervention Developer

Regular small group checkins can be an outlet for feelings of frustration and stress. Acknowledgement of the stressful conditions by administration can help educators feel heard.

Individuals can protect against and manage secondary traumatic stress by practicing self-care through regular exercise, a healthy diet, and sufficient sleep. Activities such as yoga or meditation can be helpful in reducing general stress. It is important for staff to take time away from the stress-inducing situation. Spending time with family or friends, or focusing on a project or hobby can help.

Secondary traumatic stress goes beyond regular stress. A counselor can be a resource for strategies to cope with the symptoms and to heal.

## Essential Resources

[Symptoms of Secondary Traumatic Stress in Staff \[quick tip\]](#)

[Supporting the Staff at a Trauma-Informed School \[quick tip\]](#)

[Teachers Helping Teachers With PFA–LPC \[quick tip\]](#)

[Self Care for Educators \[pdf\]](#)

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