



The work is hard because...

- We develop intimate relationships with people in their most vulnerable moments
- We witness stories of pain, loss and suffering
- We sometimes feel helpless under the weight of big issues (often with no end in sight)
- We work with limited resources
- Of the emotional labour it takes to manage how we feel inside vs how we present to those in our care
- Of the emotional strain and moral distress that results from difficult systems, unresolved needs, exposure to trauma, clashes with values and difficult clients
- Of demands on our time and energy and the elusive *island of and-then*

The work is meaningful and rewarding because...

- We build relationships where we are trusted by people in their most vulnerable moments
- We hold healing space when we witnessing stories of pain and loss
- We affect change through advocacy, collaboration, and engagement
- We witness the resilience, growth and success of those we serve
- We build meaningful connections with colleagues
- We are part of a network in this room that spans social service sectors and institutions as well as international boundaries



Chronic Toxic Stress

Burnout

**Empathic Strain
(Compassion Fatigue)**

**Secondary Traumatic Stress
(Vicarious Trauma)**

Thriving	Surviving	Struggling	In Crisis
Everyone is happy	Each staff member has reached their maximum level of workload	Shortage of staff capacity	Sick leave
Staff are seeing many clients and are happy, productive	External factors - IRCC policy changes	Inside themselves	Not showing up or missing work
Laughter, positive team energy,	Getting through the day, not super engaged with each other, going through the motions of the tasks at hand	Staff will take things personally.	Very controlled environment groupism
Very productive ideas: Share knowledge	Not sharing	Silence during meetings	Absenteeism
The wellness of staff is better Leaders are accessible and supportive Transparency Engagement Natural Collaboration	Overwhelmed Little Internal communication	stressful/ meetings are quiet Frustration/ Blame Slow decision-making	Team is Shrinking Fear Internal conflict No recognition of effort
People are motivated, happy to do their job, willing to share and lend a hand People are conversational People have ideas and are contributing.	Burnout, overwhelmed, but still showing up People don't ask for help when needed	People show empathy or support (gifts, flowers) People may feel targeted or that everyone is against them People feel guilty if mistakes happen	People show empathy or support People may withdraw or keep to themselves Aggression High turnover rates - frequent resignations
Open communication and strong collaboration. Willing to help Days go faster	Keeping the staff informed.	Staff seem uninterested, remain quiet Not motivated	Cliques form Snail paced day
People are happy to come to work, and there is a lot of collaboration	People are managing but have little space for innovation, creativity, and learning.	Several sick days taken, excuses not to perform duties	Team Conflicts
Innovative	Too much on our plates—a walk and time out help	When you feel out of the loop from others and not sure what is going	Lack of respect for others

People go the extra mile for each other	Individuals navigate through the everyday routine.	Short staff situation, staff turnover.	Loss of interest and motivation due to lack of acknowledgment.
Sharing ideas and brainstorming.	Lack of clear direction. Lack of recognition	The priorities are unclear. The change in the process.	Client crisis that often becomes your crisis
The ideas have been heard; follow-ups are made.	Lack of energy, enthusiasm, engagement	The purpose of the task is unclear, and the direction is limited.	Less funding, staff shrinking.
Everyone is more productive. Good relationships with co-workers	Fairness	Illness	Frequent absenteeism
When we are able to meet our goals, we help our clients successfully. Teamwork.		Lack of skills	No motivation for learning
Prioritize your well-being, and come up with strong communication skills		Changes in the workplace	
Work environment is positive - inclusive, provide opinions, personal work/life balance matters		Empathy fatigue	Staff burnout. High turnover
More small talks Innovative acceptance		Lack of understanding from other community services when working with clients - clients boomerang back to settlement	Not even greeting
Empowering the team, giving them the motivation, acknowledgment and trust. Give the team the due credits for their efforts.		Clients get affected	Reputation Damage - losing trust in the team
Clients usually evaluate the organization's performance with high satisfaction.		Lack of capacity to go above regular tasks. 'Think outside of the box'. You can't do anything extra.	

Exposure to trauma may be a work-related risk but that doesn't mean we must just accept it.

Working together, leadership can promote a culture of healing, health, and safety alongside their teams.





“ We want people to be
willing to show up and
work with kids.”
-Freado, 2025

When we do, we are often expected to walk alongside suffering, vulnerability, injustice, racism, and the impacts of trauma.

For this to be sustainable, we need to support the people showing up through integrated wellness practices.



"Mary, I've got meetings all day so I'm going to be unable to have my scheduled happiness moment at 3:01. You have it for me, OK?"

I've been learning such great self-help lessons,
but I'm having a hard time remembering them.



Me, too. I write the
important ones down
on sticky notes.

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IT'S SUPPOSED TO
RELIEVE STRESS...





Hard Truths

We are
irreplaceable in
the lives of our
loved ones.



Hard Truths

We are not
infinite sources
of energy and
resources



Hard Truths

We cannot
do this work
alone.



Hard Truths

We cannot be...
All things
To all people
At all times

1. TRAINING & FOLLOW-UP SUPPORT

Meaningful · Relevant · Trauma-informed



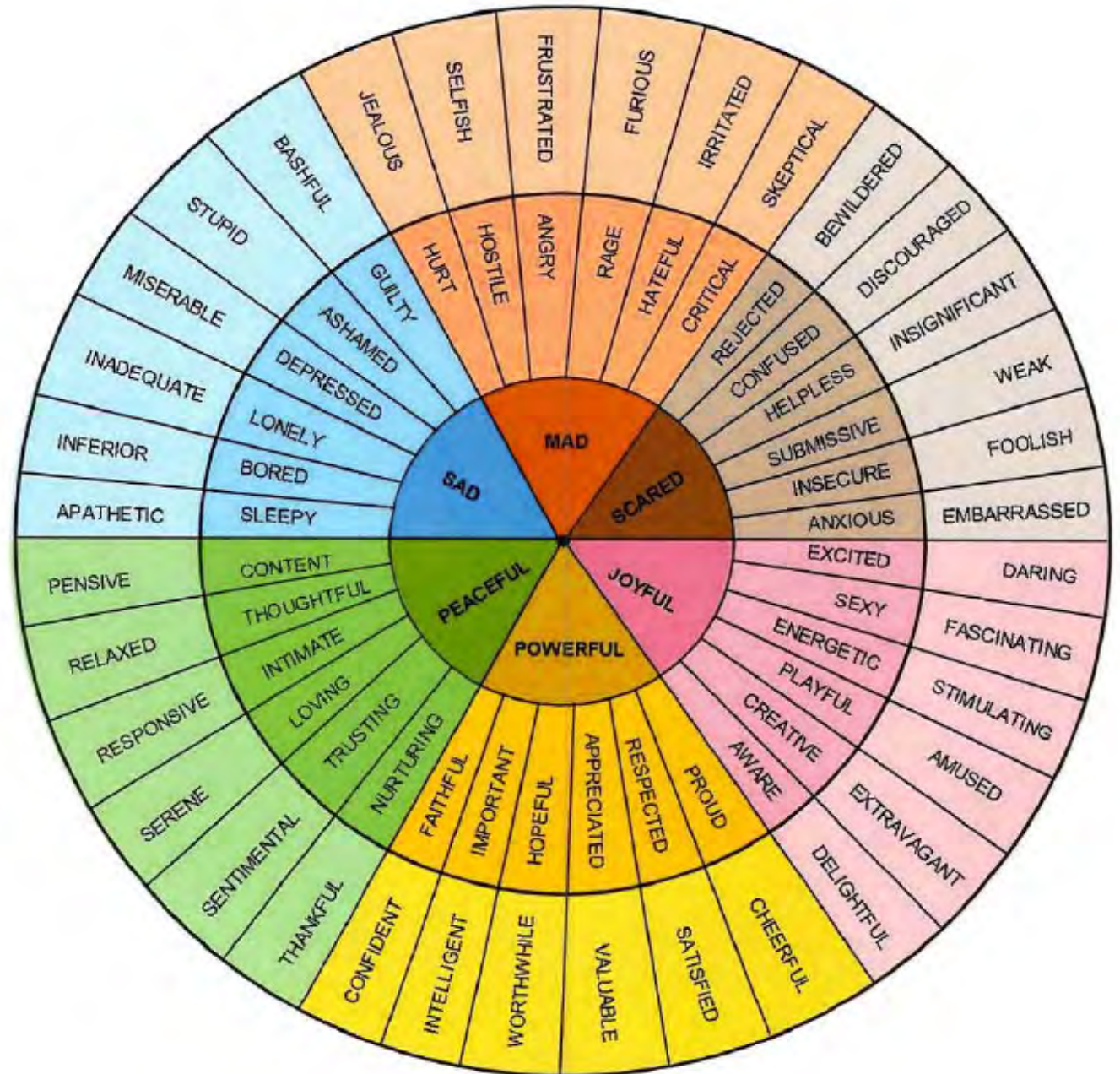
2. RESOURCING SKILLS



- Recognize what's happening (nervous system response/dysregulation)
- Check your breath
- Take a break
- Redirect the story
- Establish boundaries and refer
- Resourcing using senses
- Stay grounded

3. REFLECTION

We need opportunities to process experiences and emotions.



Source: Feeling Wheel from Wilcox, Gloria (1982): "The Feeling Wheel: A Tool for Expanding Awareness of Emotions and Increasing Spontaneity and Intimacy"

4. NARRATIVE PRACTICE

We need time for meaningful team connection.



“If you take out the team in teamwork, it’s just work. Now who wants that?”

Matthew Woodring Stover

Storytelling

Supporting Organizational Wellness through Staff Connection:

A Facilitated Pause

A new training and approach that focuses on supporting wellness by strengthening team connections. We will facilitate narrative practices that focus on our own stories and values noting how they connect us with each other. ***This is not a therapy session and does not require exposing vulnerabilities.*** We will work with organizers to determine which activities will be the best fit. Examples include Tree of Life, Gratitude ABC's, Artifact Storytelling, Notes of Appreciation, Finding our Shared Story and more!

5. COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

We cannot do this work alone.





We need **Circles of Support and to know who our people are that:**

- Get it!
- Hold us accountable
- Give us support
- Bring us calm
- Bring us joy and laughter
- Help us feel connected

We need space to talk about what's hard



Recognize the challenges



Understand & acknowledge the impact



Address what can (and needs to) be changed



Reach out for help



Peer consult with colleagues

**We need to
recognize and
acknowledge our
contributions and
successes.**

**Talk about what's
going right!**



Talk about what's been accomplished
individually and collectively



Recognize what's going well



Share stories of resilience



Appreciate our contributions



Share gratitude

ZONE of

FABULOUSNESS

RESISTING BURNOUT & SHOULDERING EACH OTHER UP



<https://vikkireynolds.ca/>

“Howling at the Moon”



Secondary Traumatic Stress Core Competencies in Trauma-Informed Supervision Self-Rating Tool

Competency #1: Knowledge of the signs, symptoms, and risk factors of STS and its impact on employees; Knowledge of agency support options, referral process for employee assistance, or external support resources for supervisees who are experiencing symptoms of STS.

The Supervisor is able to do the following:

Competency	Self-Rating		
Recognize the signs of STS in their supervisees	Not part of my skill set yet	Doing OK but need more training	I have confidence in my skills in this area
Address observed STS with symptomatic employees in a supportive manner that normalizes their responses, promotes resiliency, and is supportive of the supervisee and does not pathologize, demean, or threaten the supervisee	Not part of my skill set yet	Doing OK but need more training	I have confidence in my skills in this area
Delineate what the STS-informed services and support options are available from the organization	Not part of my skill set yet	Doing OK but need more training	I have confidence in my skills in this area
Facilitate the referral process for accessing available, quality services for symptomatic employees	Not part of my skill set yet	Doing OK but need more training	I have confidence in my skills in this area
Identify other resources that provide STS prevention or intervention services and is able to assist the employee into accessing those resources	Not part of my skill set yet	Doing OK but need more training	I have confidence in my skills in this area
Encourage the consistent use of organizational supports for the mitigation/ prevention of STS symptoms as a normalized part of doing this work	Not part of my skill set yet	Doing OK but need more training	I have confidence in my skills in this area



https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/special-resource/secondary_traumatic_stress_competencies_rating_tool.pdf



Center on Trauma
and Children

Evidence in Action



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The Secondary Traumatic Stress Informed Organization Assessment (STSI-OA)

1. The organization promotes resilience-building activities that enhance the following:

	Not at all	Rarely	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely	N/A
a. Basic knowledge about STS	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Monitoring the impact of STS on professional well-being.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Maintaining positive focus on the core mission for which the	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



**Thank you for the
work you
do that brings
hope and
improves the
lives of those you
touch.**

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