



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**

Division of Social Services

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services STEP Up: Skills Training for Experienced Professionals

Participant Workbook Module Eight: Self-Care and Worker Safety

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**PUBLIC
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Instructions

This course was designed to guide child welfare professionals through the knowledge, skills, and behaviors needed to engage with families in need of child protection services. The workbook is structured to help you engage in the lesson through reflection and analysis throughout each module of training. Have this workbook readily available as you go through each module to create a long-lasting resource you can reference in the future.

If you are using this workbook electronically: workbook pages have text boxes for you to add notes and reflections. Due to formatting, if you are typing in these boxes, blank lines will be “pushed” forward onto the next page. To correct this when you are done typing in the text box, you may use the delete key to remove extra lines.

Training Overview

STEP Up: Skills Training for Experienced Professionals is designed to strengthen and refine the knowledge, skills, and behaviors of child welfare professionals through structured, practice-focused learning.

Training sessions are intentionally designed to support active engagement, reflection, and application. Each module includes a combination of lecture, guided discussion, individual practical application, and collaborative debrief. This structure allows participants to connect new learning to their existing experience and apply concepts directly to their daily practice.

Attendance and participation are essential to the learning experience. If an emergency prevents attendance, participants are responsible for notifying the trainer and their supervisor as soon as possible and developing a plan to address missed content.

Learning Expectations

STEP Up builds on prior experience in child welfare practice. Participants are expected to:

- Engage actively in discussions and activities
- Reflect on their current practice and identify areas for growth
- Apply learning to real-world scenarios
- Collaborate with peers to strengthen practice and shared understanding

Transfer of Learning

A core component of STEP Up is the application of learning to practice. Throughout the training, participants will engage in structured reflection and practical application activities designed to support transfer of learning.

Participants will:

- Reflect on how new concepts align with their current work
- Identify specific actions to strengthen their practice
- Apply learning between sessions, when applicable

- Engage in peer discussion and collaborative problem-solving
- Supervisors and ongoing professional supports play a critical role in reinforcing learning and supporting continued development in the workplace.

All matters as stated above are subject to change due to unforeseen circumstances, and with approval.

STEP Up Module Eight Learning Objectives

Module 8
Self-Care and Worker Safety
Upon completion of this course, learners will be able to: • Develop and apply effective coping strategies to manage the psychological stresses associated with child welfare work, maintain emotional well-being, and prevent burnout. • Demonstrate the ability to prioritize tasks, manage time efficiently, and utilize available resources to maintain productivity and reduce work-related stress. • Identify physical, emotional, and behavioral signs of stress, and understand how these indicators may manifest in child welfare contexts.

Module Eight Agenda

Module Eight: Self-Care and Worker Safety

Module Timing: 180 Minutes

Welcome

Section 1: Recognizing Stress Indicators

Section 2: Managing Personal Stress and Preventing Burnout

Section 3: Effective Workload and Time Management

Section 4: Recognizing and Responding to Safety Risks in the Field

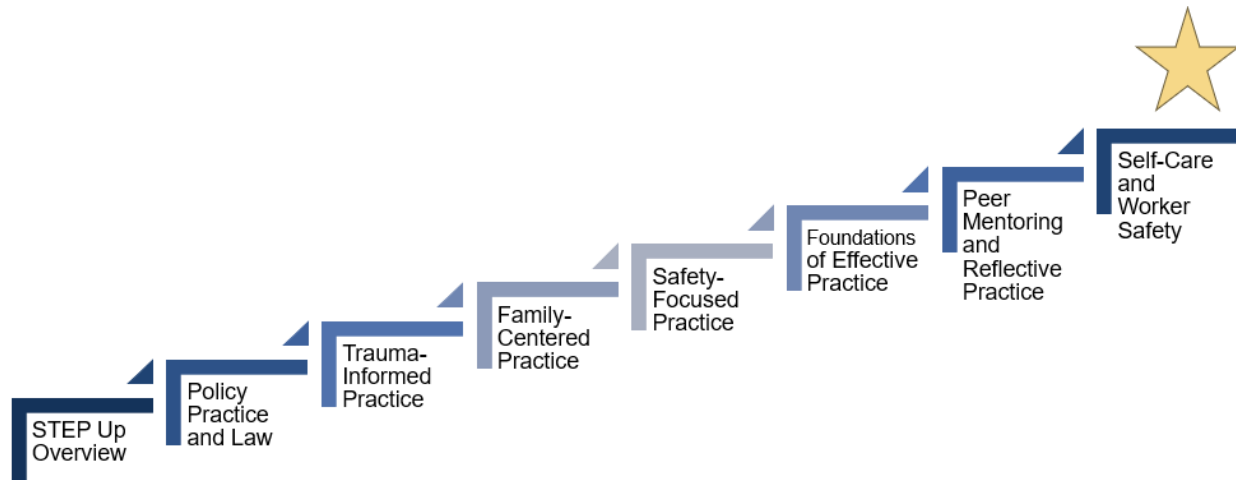
Section 5: Individual Practice and Application

Section 6: Debrief and Collaborative Practice

STEP Up Training Wrap-Up

STEP Up: Skills Training for Experienced Professionals. Module Eight: Self-Care and Worker Safety

STEP Up Course Series Outline and Structure



Worker Safety Begins with You

Video: [Impact of Secondary Traumatic Stress on the Child Welfare Workforce](#)

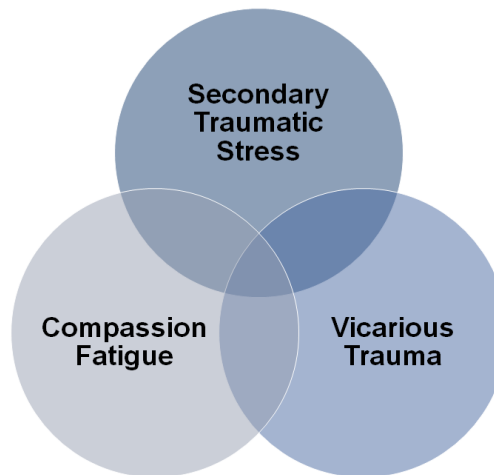
Watch the video titled “Impact of Secondary Traumatic Stress on the Child Welfare Workforce,” and use the guiding questions below to reflect on what you observe and learn.

What does it mean to say that child welfare work can “trigger” you?

Reflect on the situations in child welfare work that might affect you emotionally. What strategies will you use to manage that response in the moment?

What from this video makes you think differently about your experiences as a child welfare caseworker?

Indirect Trauma



Indirect Trauma

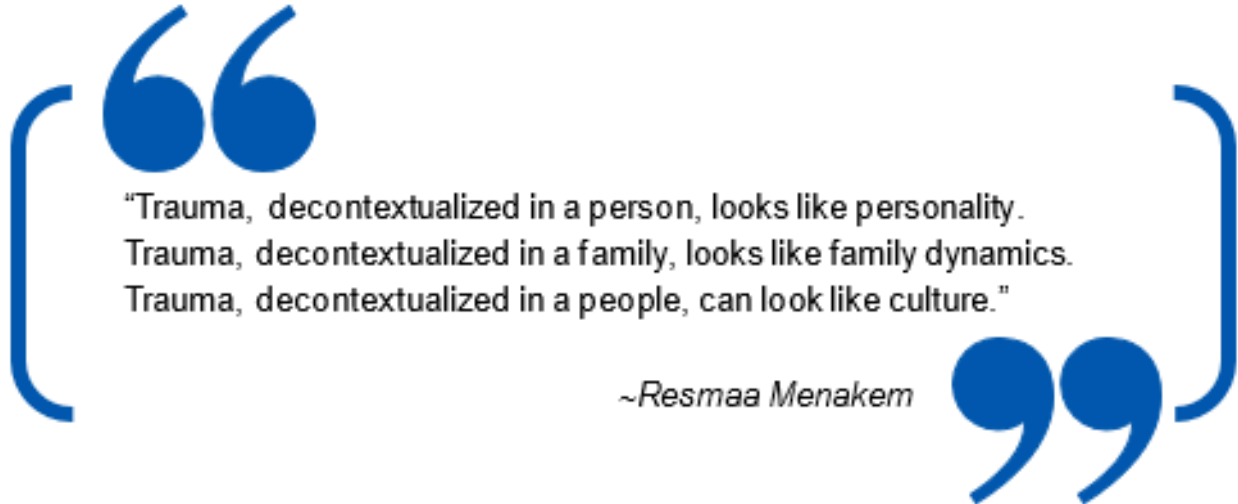
Exposure to others' trauma is called "Indirect trauma." There are three types of indirect trauma: Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS), Vicarious Trauma (VT), and Compassion Fatigue (CF). Indirect trauma may occur when people hear about, see evidence or images, or are exposed to other traumatic events through persistent and close contact with trauma survivors. Let's acknowledge that this definition is quite literally the definition of your job: hearing children and families relate their stories of trauma and supporting them as they seek healing, safety, and family integrity. Secondary Traumatic Stress, Compassion Fatigue, and Vicarious Trauma are common in child welfare caseworkers. In fact, a survey of 992 child welfare workers and supervisors found that more than half reported experiencing secondary traumatic stress symptoms in the last seven days.

Secondary Traumatic Stress, or STS, is emotional distress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another. It is indirect exposure to threatening events that can result in the presence of posttraumatic stress symptoms.

Compassion fatigue is the physical and emotional exhaustion experienced by those who care for others who are in distress. It is a less clinical and less stigmatizing term and is often used interchangeably with Secondary Traumatic Stress.

Vicarious trauma occurs after empathic engagement with a traumatized client and changes the inner experience of a practitioner. This term focuses less on trauma symptoms and more on cognitive changes that occur following cumulative exposure to another person's trauma. The symptoms of vicarious trauma are disturbances in the cognitive frame of reference in the areas of trust, safety, control, esteem, and intimacy.

Decontextualized Trauma



Child welfare work creates conditions for indirect trauma. These conditions increase the risk of vicarious trauma, secondary traumatic stress, and compassion fatigue in daily practice. When trauma is constantly present, coping behaviors can become separated from the source of trauma.

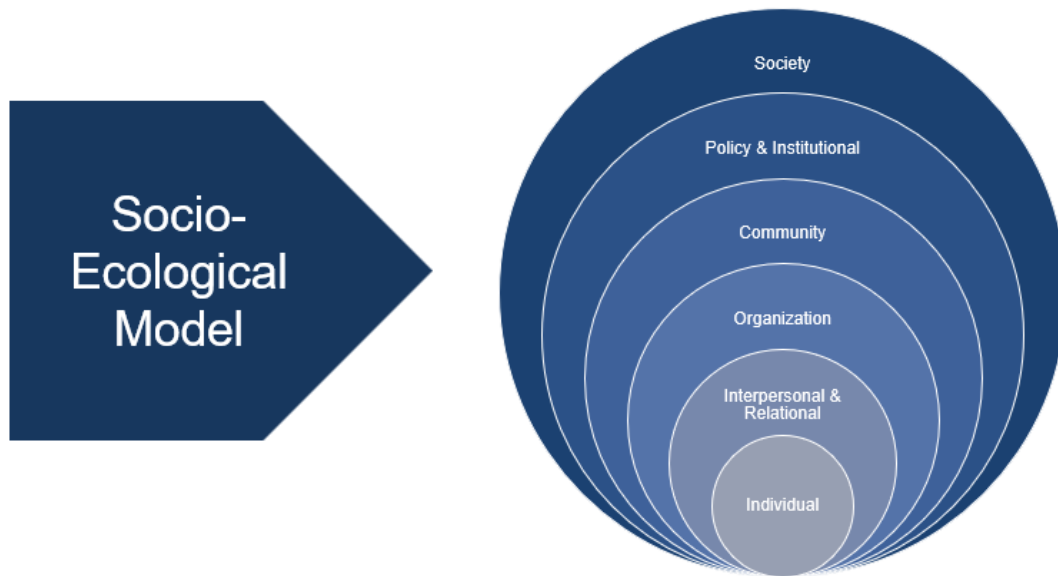
The American Psychological Association defines decontextualization as the dissociation of a traumatic event from its original context. Resmaa Menakem explains that trauma separated from its context can appear as personality traits, family patterns, or cultural norms. In child welfare, repeated and normalized coping behaviors may seem like standard practice, but they represent a collective trauma response.

The fact that these dynamics feel normal is due to the collective nature of the experience. So many caseworkers within child welfare share these behaviors and characteristics out of the normalization and decontextualization of trauma, not because it is “normal.” The good news is that we can begin shifting the workforce toward resilience and healing. The first step is bringing the context back and normalizing the behaviors and responses to stress and trauma.

What are other elements we often consider a “normal” part of the child welfare industry that could be symptoms of trauma?

--

Sociological Model

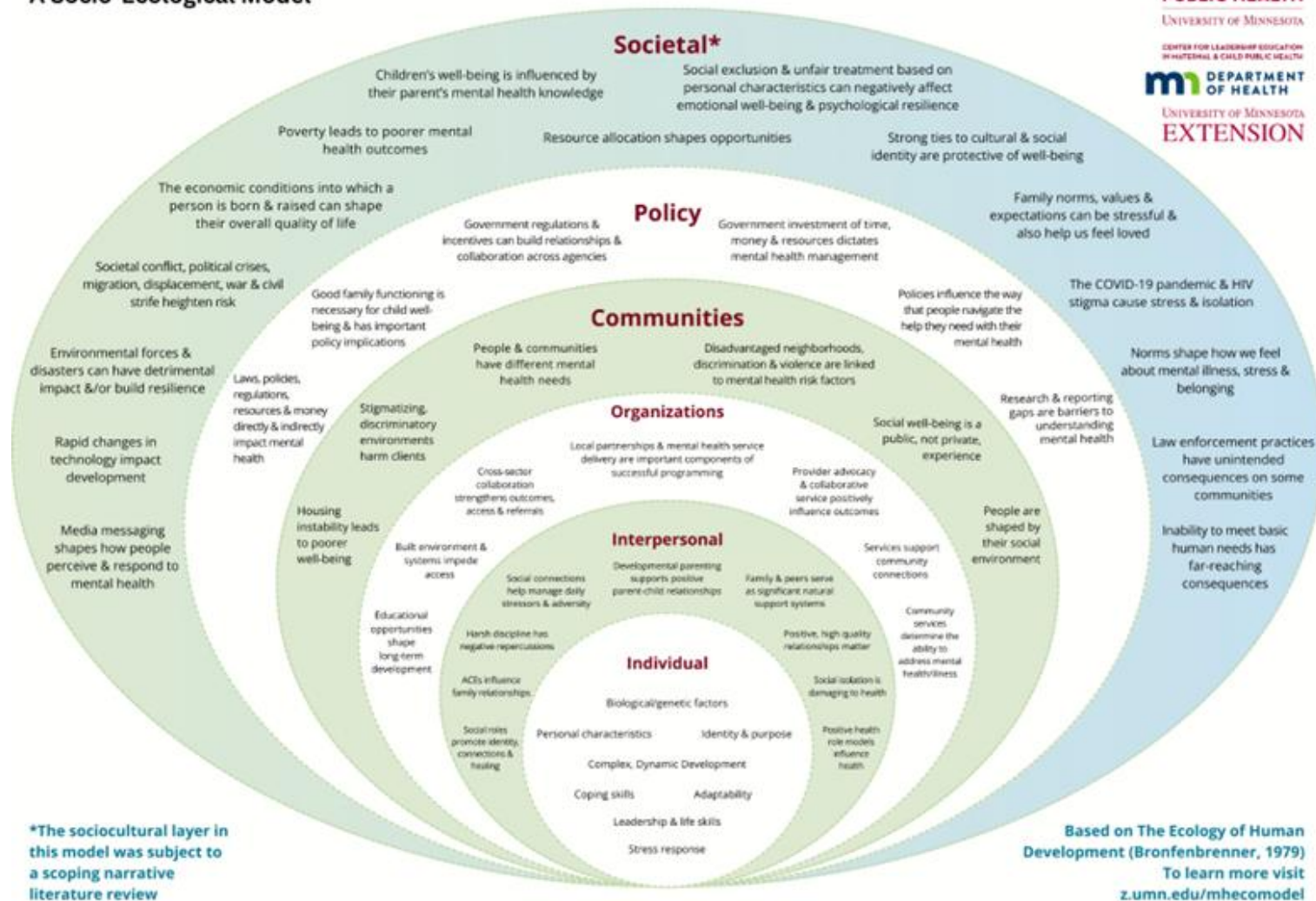


The socio-ecological model illustrates the many layers of impact on our mental health and well-being. The influence of all contexts, systems, and environments on an individual must be recognized to completely understand and support the healthy development of wellness and well-being among individuals. This model helps us know that well-being and wellness are not just individual efforts. Many of the factors that influence or impact our work are beyond our control.

Notes

Handout: Layers of the Socio-Ecological Model

Mental Health & Well-being: A Socio-Ecological Model



Section 2: Managing Personal Stress and Preventing Burnout

Managing Personal Stress



Self-care planning is a tool for claiming our ability to prevent and intervene in the impact of stress and building support in the areas where we have control. Self-care can be easier said than done in the fast-paced, emotionally charged, crisis-intervention, non-9-to-5 nature of child welfare. Having the opportunity to express how this work affects us will help us function better. Recognizing how we decontextualize trauma and using the socio-ecological model to bring context back to trauma will help us move toward healthier ways to process trauma.

There will be barriers to completing your self-care plan. Being aware of these barriers and planning for them will increase your likelihood of successfully using your self-care plan. Assess and make plans for when the impact is greater, claiming control where possible, even in uncontrollable circumstances.

Where do you have support?

--

Where do you need to build coping and support systems?

--

What will be challenging for you? (Consider any barriers that may be present)

--

What comes easily?

Preventing Burnout



Child welfare work is emotionally demanding and often urgent. Preventing burnout is not optional; it is a professional responsibility. When you care for your own well-being, you protect your ability to support children and families effectively over time.

Preventing burnout starts with intentionally managing stress. This includes caring deeply about the work without absorbing the crisis as your own. Healthy emotional boundaries allow you to stay compassionate while avoiding internalizing the trauma you witness. You are not meant to carry every story alone.

Small, consistent practices help regulate your nervous system and reduce stress. Be gentle with yourself. Cultivate realistic expectations and remember that you do not need to be perfect or “superhuman” to be effective.

Notes

Dimensions of Well-Being



Wellness is a dynamic, holistic process of becoming aware of and making choices toward a healthy, fulfilling life.

Rather than being defined solely by the absence of illness, wellness is an active pursuit that encompasses multiple interconnected dimensions. The Dimensions of Wellness framework provides a comprehensive approach to understanding and supporting overall self-care and well-being.

Prevention techniques:

- Psychoeducation
- Clinical supervision
- Ongoing skills training
- Informal/formal self-report screening
- Workplace self-care groups (for example, yoga or meditation)
- Creation of a balanced caseload
- Flextime scheduling
- Self-care accountability buddy system
- Use of evidence-based practices
- Exercise and good nutrition

Intervention techniques:

- Strategies to evaluate secondary stress
- Cognitive behavioral interventions
- Mindfulness training
- Reflective supervision
- Caseload adjustment
- Informal gatherings following crisis events (to allow for voluntary, spontaneous discussions)
- Change in job assignment or workgroup
- Referrals to Employee Assistance Programs or outside agencies

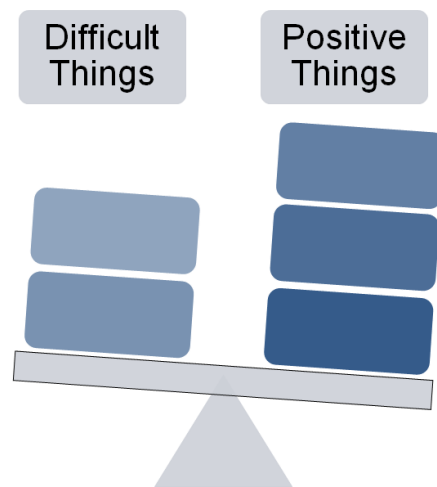
The Science of Resilience

Video: InBrief: The Science of Resilience

Watch the video titled “InBrief: The Science of Resilience,” and use the guiding question below to reflect on what you observe and learn.

Notes

Resilience

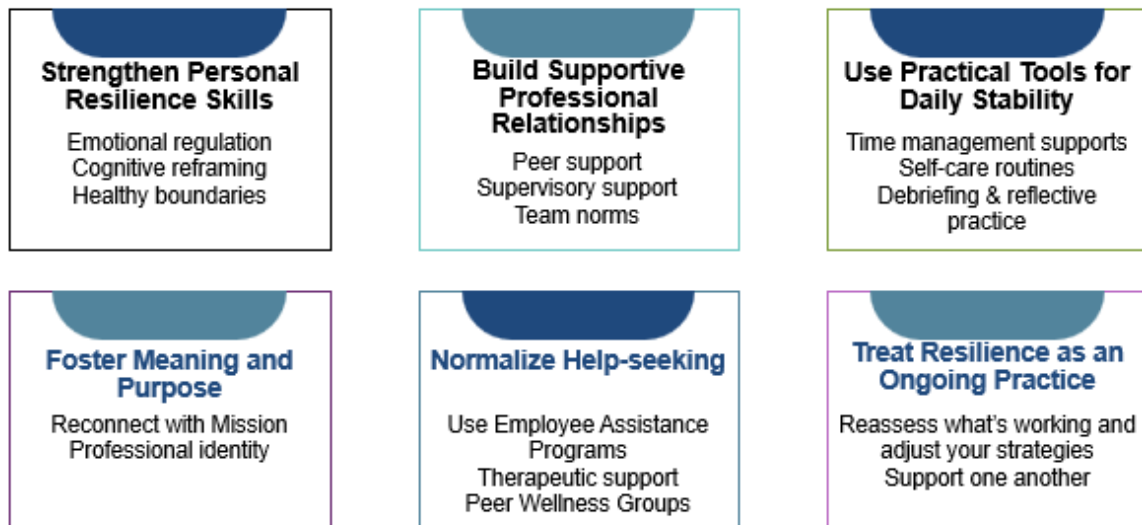


Resilience is the counterbalancing of difficult things. Well-being supports resilience development by highlighting the interplay among genetics, life experiences, and environmental factors.

In the video, what individual elements impact the placement of the fulcrum?

How does the scale metaphor in this video illustrate the importance of well-being for you in this line of work?

Coping and Resilience Strategies



What strategies do you want to try? How might you apply these strategies?

Section 3: Effective Workload and Time Management

Workload Prioritization

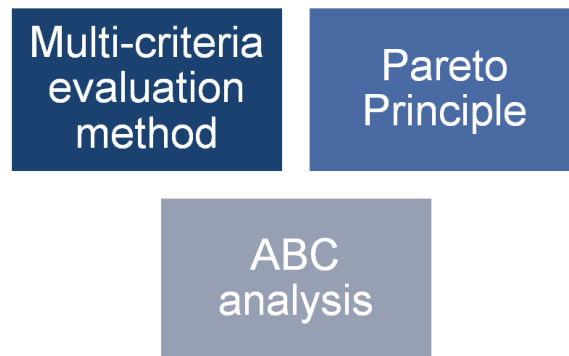
	URGENT	NONURGENT
IMPORTANT	QUADRANT 1 Important and Urgent Goals and Activities 1. Crisis-ridden activities 2. Urgent issues 3. Projects that are on the edge of failing 4. Taxes, debts, crisis	QUADRANT 2 Important but Nonurgent Goals and Activities 1. Defining the causes, planning 2. Preventive activities 3. Creating new opportunities 4. Health, money, relations
UNIMPORTANT	QUADRANT 3 Insignificant but Urgent Goals and Activities 1. Minor notifications 2. Presenting useless reports 3. Worthless meetings 4. Unplanned calls	QUADRANT 4 Insignificant and Nonurgent Goals and Activities 1. Watching low-quality TV series 2. Playing games 3. Pointless meetings 4. "Mandatory" events 5. Other people's goals

The Eisenhower Matrix is a time management tool that categorizes tasks based on urgency and importance, dividing them into four quadrants:

- Quadrant 1 (Urgent & Important) represents crisis-driven tasks that demand immediate attention. While these tasks are critical, constant focus here leads to stress and burnout
- Quadrant 2 (Not Urgent but Important) is the most valuable area for long-term success. It includes strategic planning, personal development, and proactive efforts that prevent future crises
- Quadrant 3 (Urgent but Not Important) often misleads individuals into thinking they're being productive. These tasks are typically distractions driven by external pressures and lack real significance
- Quadrant 4 (Not Urgent & Not Important) consists of trivial activities that waste time and resources. Successful individuals avoid this quadrant and prioritize meaningful goals

Notes

Task Management



One tip is to use a 5-step evaluation method if you struggle to prioritize tasks.

The Multi-Criteria Evaluation Method includes:

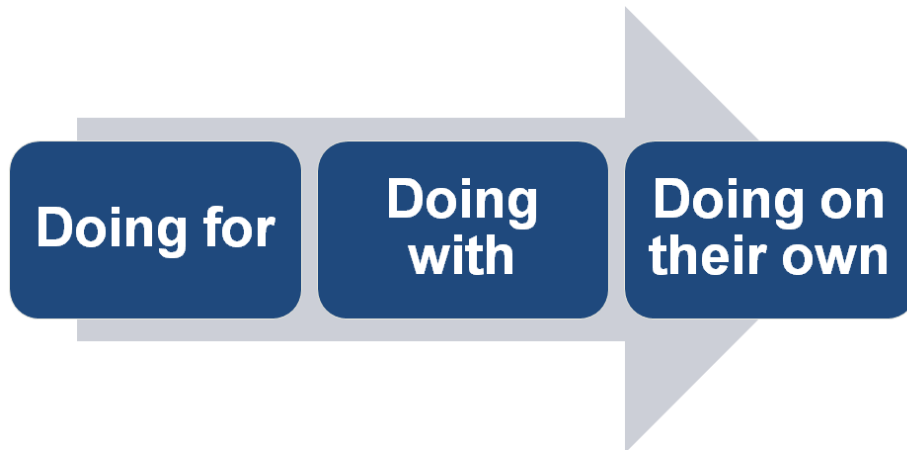
- Step 1: Define 5–7 criteria for decision-making
- Step 2: Assign weights to each criterion
- Step 3: Rate each option on a 3-point scale
- Step 4: Multiply ratings by weights and sum them
- Step 5: Choose the highest-scoring option

The Pareto Principle is a powerful tool for boosting efficiency. The Pareto Principle, also known as the 80/20 rule, states that 20% of efforts account for 80% of results. That means a small portion of your actions can lead to the majority of your outcomes. Instead of trying to do everything, identify the few tasks that truly matter. These drive the biggest impact. The rest are often just busy work. Think about your relationships; only a few people truly make a difference. Typically, 20% of customers generate 80% of revenue. The same goes for learning. Only a small part of what you read or watch sticks and makes a difference. The principle was inspired by the economist Vilfredo Pareto, who observed that 20% of families held 80% of the wealth. Later, Joseph Juran named and popularized the concept in quality management. Don't aim for 100% perfection. Instead, focus your energy on the vital few. That's the art of smart work, achieving more by doing less. Apply the Pareto Principle. Maximize results. Minimize effort.

The ABC Analysis is a method for prioritizing inventory or tasks based on their value and impact. ABC Analysis divides items into three categories: A, B, and C, based on their importance.

- Category A: These are the most valuable items. They represent a small portion of total items but contribute the most to overall value, typically around 70-80% of the impact from just 10-20% of the items.
- Category B: Moderately important items. They account for about 15-25% of the impact and represent a larger portion of the inventory than A items.
- Category C: These are the least valuable. They make up the majority of items but contribute only 5-10% of the impact.

Leveraging Resources and Team Collaboration

**Empowerment Progression:**

Empower families to progress from doing for → doing with → doing on their own.

What are some resources you leverage to manage your casework?

What are some examples of team collaboration that have helped you manage your casework?

Setting Boundaries and Managing Expectations

Strategies to Create Boundaries	Strategies to Maintain Boundaries
• Clarify Your Role Early • Establish Expectations • Use Supervision Proactively	• Monitor Emotional Involvement • Avoid Dual Relationships • Practice Self-Awareness

Professional boundaries are the invisible lines that define the limits and responsibilities of the social worker–client relationship.

Notes

Email: Managing the Flood of Information

The **3–21–0 Method** helps professionals manage email overload by promoting focused, time-bound sessions that protect attention and boost productivity.

- 3: Check email only three times a day
- 21: Spend 21 minutes per session
- 0: Aim for zero emails left (inbox zero)

The **Inbox Zero Method** was introduced in a 2007 Google Tech Talk and emphasizes that email is a tool, not a task, and should be managed efficiently to preserve focus and reduce stress.

Supporting Practices per Inbox Zero Method:

- Unsubscribe from unnecessary emails
- Use the 2-minute rule: if an email takes less than 2 minutes to handle, do it immediately
- Batch email sessions to avoid constant interruptions
- Write better emails to reduce back-and-forth
- Schedule email time and avoid checking outside those windows

Inbox Harmony uses machine learning to provide personalized, multi-label recommendations for organizing emails, helping users achieve a more structured, efficient inbox without manual folder management. Key Features include:

- Two-Part System:
 1. ML Model Selection & Deployment: Uses Classifier Chains (multi-label classification) and Fuzzy C-Means (soft clustering) to analyze email content
 2. Personalized Recommendations: Suggests moving emails to existing folders or creating new folders based on similarity and user behavior
- Hybrid Approach: Trains models on individual Gmail accounts for accuracy and personalization
- Multi-Label Capability: Unlike traditional filters, it can recommend multiple folders for a single email
- User Interaction: Integrated as a Gmail add-on, allowing users to accept, reject, or delete recommendations with one click
- Adaptive Learning: Continuously improves recommendations based on user actions

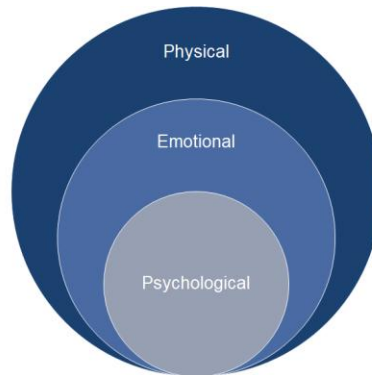
Which method for managing the email flood of information would work best for you and why?

What is one step you can take today to begin managing email?

What resonated most with you when thinking about emails, your energy, and focus?

Section 4: Recognizing and Responding to Safety Risks in the Field

Defining Worker Safety



- **Emotional safety** is about the ability to identify our feelings and being able to feel them and feeling safe enough to express ourselves authentically. This includes the ability to be resilient at work
- **Psychological safety** is the belief that you won't be punished or humiliated for speaking up about your ideas, questions, concerns, or making mistakes
- **Physical safety**, as you can imagine, is about being protected from physical aggression and violence and minimizing the possibility of injury

“When social workers attend to their own wellness by reducing various negative health risk factors, social workers may be able to more effectively address the well-being of marginalized populations and society at-large.”

-National Association of Social Workers, North Carolina Chapter

Notes

Recognizing Safety Risks in the Field

How might your safety be compromised while you're working in the field?



Any time you are in a potentially dangerous situation, there are three things for you to consider:

- The conditions of your surroundings, or the physical environment
- The characteristics of the other person, and
- The impact of your own behavior

What is the difference between an intense, emotionally-charged conversation and a threat to your safety?

--

What can you do to avoid violence or danger?

--

Responding to Safety Risks in the Field

The best way to avoid violence and danger is to prevent it in the first place.



The best way to avoid violence and danger is to prevent it in the first place.

Activity: Responding to Safety Risks in the Field

The purpose of this activity is for learners to brainstorm proactive ways to prevent safety risks and respond in ways that are protective.

What to do:

- The training facilitator will assign each group a list of safety risks from the large group discussion on recognizing safety risks in the field
- With your group, brainstorm techniques or ideas to prevent each safety concern, as well as an intervention for each one
- Record your ideas for prevention and intervention in the space below
- Be prepared to share your group's ideas

Safety Risks assigned to your group	Prevention & Interventions

Safety Risks assigned to your group	Prevention & Interventions

What was something you learned during this exercise that you hadn't thought of before now?

When is the time to plan for safety?

What do you need to add to your personal safety plan after this exercise?

Utilizing NC Child Welfare Policy and Protocols for Worker Safety and Wellness

Activity: Considerations for Worker Safety

The purpose of this activity is for learners to become familiar with NC policies that guide caseworker safety and well-being.

What to do:

- Review the North Carolina DSS child welfare Appendix 6: Best Practices for social worker well-being policy online
- With your group, answer the questions below

NC DSS child welfare policy emphasizes that social workers' well-being is closely connected to feeling effective and valued in their work.

Thinking about your current or past role, what practices, structures, or supports have most helped you feel successful?

Where do you notice gaps that impact your well-being?

Family-Centered Practice is described as beneficial not only for families, but also for social workers themselves.

In what ways have approaches that emphasize respect, shared power, and strengths influenced your stress level, job satisfaction, or sense of purpose in child welfare practice?

Caseworker well-being is shaped by both individual practice and the larger system in which the work occurs.

Which aspects of agency culture or policy most affect your ability to maintain well-being?

How do those factors show up in your day-to-day practice?

Based on your experience, what is one realistic change at the team or supervisory level that could strengthen worker well-being while still prioritizing child safety and family outcomes?

Section 5: Individual Practice and Application

Self-Care Self-Assessment

Activity: Self-Care Self-Assessment

The following self-care assessment worksheet is not exhaustive; it is merely suggestive. Please add areas of self-care that you believe are relevant for you, and rate yourself on how often and how well you take care of yourself.

When you are finished, look for patterns in your responses. Pay attention to areas where you are more active and areas you ignore. Ask yourself about items on the list that make you think, “I would never do that.” Listen to your inner responses and dialogue about self-care and making yourself and your well-being a priority. Make note of what you want to include more in your life.

Use the following scale to rate each area:

- 3= I do this well (for example, frequently)
- 2= I do this okay (for example, occasionally)
- 1= I barely or rarely do this
- 0= I never do this
- ?= This never occurred to me

Physical Self-Care	
	Eat regularly (e.g., breakfast, lunch, dinner)
	Eat healthy
	Exercise
	Get regular medical care when needed
	Take time off when sick
	Get massages
	Dance, swim, walk, run, play sports, sing, or do some other fun physical activity
	Get enough sleep
	Wear clothes I like
	Take vacations
	Other:
Emotional Self-Care	
	Spend time with others whose company I enjoy
	Stay in contact with important people in my life
	Give myself affirmations, praise myself
	Love myself
	Re-read favorite books, re-view favorite movies
	Identify comforting activities, objects, people, and places, and seek them out
	Allow myself to cry
	Find things that make me laugh
	Express my outrage in social action, letters, donations, marches, and protests
	Other:
Psychological Self-Care	

	Take day trips or mini vacations
	Make time away from telephones, email, and the internet
	Make time for self-reflection
	Notice my inner experience: listen to my thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings
	Have my own personal psychotherapy
	Write in a journal
	Read literature that is unrelated to work
	Do something at which I am not an expert or in charge
	Attend to minimizing stress in my life
	Engage my intelligence in new areas (e.g. go to an art show, sports event, theater)
	Be curious
	Say no to responsibilities sometimes
	Other:
Spiritual Self-Care	
	Make time for reflection
	Spend time in nature
	Find a spiritual connection or community
	Be open to inspiration
	Cherish my optimism and hope
	Be aware of non-material aspects of life
	Try at time not to be in charge or the expert
	Be open to not knowing
	Identify what is meaningful to me and notice its place in my life

	Meditate
	Pray
	Sing
	Have experiences of awe
	Contribute to causes in which I believe
	Read inspirational literature or listen to inspirational talks, music
	Other:
Relationship Self-Care	
	Schedule regular activities with people that you love
	Call, check on, or see my relatives
	Make time to see friends
	Spend time with my companion animals
	Stay in contact with faraway friends
	Make time to reply to personal emails and letters; send holiday cards
	Allow others to do things for me
	Enlarge my social circle
	Ask for help when I need it
	Share a fear, hope, or secret with someone I trust
	Other:
Workplace or Professional Self-Care	
	Take a break during the workday (e.g., lunch)
	Take time to chat with co-workers
	Make quiet time to complete tasks
	Identify projects or tasks that are exciting and rewarding

	Set limits with clients and colleagues
	Balance my caseload so that no one day or part of a day isn't "too much"
	Arrange work space so it is comfortable and comforting
	Get regular supervision of consultation
	Negotiate for my needs (benefits, pay raise)
	Have a peer support group
	Develop a non-trauma area of professional interest
	Other:
Overall Balance	
	Strive for balance within my work-life and work day
	Strive for balance among work, family, relationships, play and rest
Other Areas Relevant to Me	

Reflective Assessment: Indirect Stress

In this activity, you will assess the impact of indirect trauma and stress on yourself and your well-being. Contemplate and record your answers to the questions below:

What activities reliably help me reset after a stressful day?

How often am I permitting myself to rest without guilt?

What small daily rituals help me transition out of “work mode”?

What boundaries between work and home need strengthening?

--

Identify protective factors (what is working well).

--

Consider the next steps and whether the identified steps are about addressing safety concerns, minimizing risk, or addressing the Caseworker's non-safety-related worries.

--

Coping and Resilience Strategies

Using the “Building & Preserving Resilience in Child Welfare Work” handout from earlier in training today, write out a plan for how you will implement or use each resilience strategy.

Activity: Building & Preserving Resilience in Child Welfare Work:

1. Personal Resilience Skills

Emotional Regulation

Cognitive Reframing

Healthy Boundaries

2. Supportive Professional Relationships

Peer Support

--

Supervisory Support

--

Team Culture

--

3. Daily Stability Tools

Time Management

--

Self-Care Routines

--

--

Reflective Practice

--

4. Meaning & Purpose

Reconnect With Your “Why”

--

Professional Identity

--

5. Normalize Help-Seeking

Support Resources

--

Activity: Coping and Resilience Strategies

What is one small habit that helps your body feel strong or energized?

What is something new you've learned recently that energized you?

What emotion has been showing up for you lately, and what might it be trying to tell you?

What part of your work gives you a sense of purpose or satisfaction?

What are some prevention techniques to support well-being?

What are some strategies for intervening when you are struggling with any dimension of well-being?

Applying Time and Task Management Theory to Practice

What to do:

Apply the email time and task management theories to your email inbox

3-21-0:

- To get started, move all current emails to a folder called “Old Inbox”
- Enjoy your clean slate
- Schedule three daily sessions (morning, early afternoon, evening) to apply the 3–21–0 Method:
 - 3: Check email only three times a day
 - 21: Spend 21 minutes per session
 - 0: Aim for zero emails left (inbox zero)
- Avoid checking email outside these windows

Inbox Zero: the goal is to reduce how much time your brain is “in the inbox”

- Spend five minutes going through your “old Inbox” and take one of five actions for every email:
 1. Delete
 2. Delegate
 3. Respond
 4. Defer
 5. Do (take immediate action, Use the 2-minute rule: if an email takes less than 2 minutes to handle, do it immediately)
- Finally, unsubscribe from unnecessary emails

Identifying and Securing Resources for Support

What to do:

Identify and explore resources for well-being in your home community.

- Using the North Carolina NC 211 resource online and your web browser, identify and explore at least four resources in your community for your well-being and self-care [<https://www.unitedwaync.org/nc-211>]
- Ideas include: counseling services, fitness gyms or clubs, support groups, hobby clubs or meetings (knitting, book club), sports or fitness groups (adult kickball league, women's community softball league)

Community Resources for my well-being and self-care:

1.
2.
3.
4.

Building a Strategic Personal Self-Care Plan

What to do:

- Use the following worksheet to write a purposeful and functional plan to support and care for yourself
- Be sure to include both preventive measures and plans for what you will do in times of crisis or exposure to high-stress or distressing events

Activity: Self-Care Plan

MIND

EMOTIONS

WORK

BODY

SPIRIT

RELATIONSHIPS

Section 6: Debrief and Collaborative Practice

Impacts of Indirect Stress and Decontextualized Trauma on Workforce Performance



Child welfare work is inherently emotionally demanding.

Indirect stress and decontextualized trauma don't operate separately; they amplify each other. When we're exposed to trauma through our work, it can activate old wounds we didn't realize were still there. When our own trauma is activated, it makes the indirect stress of the job feel heavier, more personal, and harder to recover from. This can lead to:

- Compassion fatigue
- Burnout
- Emotional withdrawal
- Irritability or conflict with coworkers
- Reduced decision-making capacity
- Higher turnover

Trauma can affect the quality of our engagement with families. Not because we don't care, but because we're carrying too much. The good news is that awareness is the first step toward change. Awareness and Supportive practices are protective factors.

Supportive practices include:

- Reflective supervision. Not just case review, but emotional processing
- Peer support. Spaces where workers can talk openly without judgment
- Organizational wellness strategies. Manageable caseloads, trauma-informed leadership, predictable routines
- Personal grounding practices. Mindfulness, movement, therapy, or whatever helps regulate the nervous system
- Contextualizing our own trauma. Understanding our triggers, patterns, and needs

Activity: Impacts of Indirect Stress and Decontextualized Trauma on Workforce Performance

The purpose of this activity is to explore supportive practices to mitigate the impacts of indirect stress and decontextualized trauma.

What to do:

- Spend seven minutes in your small group discussing peer support, personal grounding practices, and give the trauma context for your practices

Notes

Time and Workload Management: Your Best Tips

Activity Helpful Tips

The purpose of this activity is to share your best tips for task and time management, and check in about how well the individual practice exercise worked for you.

What to do:

- Spend five minutes in your small group sharing your best tips for task and time management, and how well the individual practice exercise worked for you.

Which time-management strategies have genuinely improved your life?

Which time-management strategies felt overrated?

How do you decide what deserves your time when everything feels important?

How do interruptions (notifications, coworkers, family, etc.) shape the way you manage your time?

How do you choose which tasks to prioritize when your to-do list feels overwhelming?

What's the difference between being "busy" and being "productive," and how do you tell which one you are?

What tools or systems (digital or analog) have helped you stay organized, and why do they work for you?

In what ways do emotions influence your ability to manage time and tasks?

Activity: Applying the Socio-Ecological Model to Well-Being

The purpose of this activity is to acknowledge the factors influencing stress and trauma experienced as part of the child welfare workforce.

What to do:

- Work with your group to brainstorm the factors that contribute to stress and trauma at each layer of the socio-ecological model.
- Identify at least five or six factors for each layer and whether you have control over factors in each layer.

Individual**Interpersonal & Relational****Organization****Community**

Policy and Institutional

--

Society

--

Self-Care Plans that Work: Accountability Partners and Supervisory Support

The purpose of this activity is to promote self-care and peer support.

What to do:

- Work with a partner
- Share responses to the following questions:

How well is your self-care plan working for you today?

Where are you successful?

Where do you need support?

What are the barriers?

STEP Up Training Series: Complete!**Notes**

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