

**Montana Department of Justice**

**Sexual Assault Kit Initiative**

**Course “Secondary Trauma”**

## Intro

**Slide 2:** Welcome to the course Secondary Trauma.

**Slide 3:** Disclaimer: This project was supported by Grant No. 2017-AK-BX-0022 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the SMART Office. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice."

**Slide 4:** Content Warning: We will be talking about sexual violence which may trigger personal feelings. Please remember to take care of yourself and do what you need to help yourself.

**Slide 5:** In this course, you will learn about secondary trauma that can affect a responder, the symptoms, self-care tips, and what your organizations can do to support you.

**Slide 6:** Secondary trauma is an occupational challenge for responders working in the fields of victim services, law enforcement, emergency medical services, and other allied professions, due to their continuous exposure to victims of trauma and violence. Secondary trauma is the natural emotions and behaviors resulting from exposure to traumatic material and the stress of helping a traumatized or suffering person. This work-related trauma exposure can occur from such experiences as listening to individuals recount their victimization; looking at videos of exploited children; reviewing case files; and hearing about or responding to the aftermath of violence and other traumatic events day after day.

## Symptoms of Secondary Trauma

**Slide 7:** When we experience overwhelming volumes of information—especially information that holds an emotional charge—our bodies, minds, and spirit adapt to help us cope. At times, the way we cope may help in the moment but may have negative long-term results.

**Slide 8:** Our bodies' adaptation of traumatic exposure is sometimes referred to as the following:

- Compassion fatigue
- Vicarious trauma
- Burnout

**Slide 9:** While there are signs you or a person you know may be dealing with secondary trauma, everyone copes differently. Some ways individuals respond to secondary trauma:

- Anxiety
- Sleep issues
- Hyper-vigilance
- Pervasive hopelessness
- Self-doubt
- Inability to concentrate/forgetfulness
- Withdrawal, isolation, apathy

- Anger
- Emotional rollercoaster
- Decreased sexual intimacy
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Poor selfcare
- Appetite changes
- Loss of purpose

If you notice any of your own experiences on this list, please remember: solutions exist.

**Slide 10:** While the symptoms themselves can be problematic, it's the long-term effects of stress that can ultimately have an impact on any individual. Some of the associated risks of stress are identified as:

- Fatigue
- Impaired immune system
- Eating disorders
- Job dissatisfaction
- Low moral
- High absenteeism
- Staff conflicts
- Depression
- Poor selfcare
- Chronic physical ailments (like colds or stomach issues)
- Substance abuse
- Heart failure or stroke

**Slide 11:** Signs and symptoms of secondary trauma are NORMAL. They happen to all of us, and are not signs of weakness or oversensitivity. They happen because we have physiological responses when we respond to the trauma of others. The negative impacts can be addressed on three levels: personal, organizational, and community.

**Slide 12:** Menu: Select a level of care to learn more.

- [Personal Care](#)
- [Organizational Care](#)
- [Community Care](#)

## Personal Care

**Slide 13:** Self-care is what people do for themselves to establish and maintain health, and to prevent and deal with illness. An effective approach to mitigate secondary trauma is to gain knowledge on self-awareness, controlling emotions, and a general understanding of one's moods and emotions.

- Allow quiet time: meditate, relax, read, listen to music, or get a massage.
- Exercise and eat healthy: it can help your nervous system to restore.

- Take mental and physical breaks from work: such as hiking, fishing, bird watching, mountain biking, or gardening.
- Participate in religious activities: and practice compassion for yourself and others.
- Focus your attention: notice and choose where you focus your attention.
- Relax areas of tension: track your body and relax areas of tension, such as your jaw or shoulders.
- Explore the value of your work: Explore why you do the work you do, and what value you get from it.
- End the workday and enter your home space: create a ritual or visualization after work to help mentally end the workday and enter your home space.
- Breathe! Practice diaphragmatic breathing or box breathing.

**Slide 14:** You can print out infographics for self-care tips and diaphragmatic breathing right here: <https://dojmt.gov/enforcement/specialservices/saki/responders/online-courses/>

You can also practice box breathing. Follow this simple exercise.

**Slide 15 and 16:** Box Breathing Instructions:

Step 1: Slowly exhale.

Sitting upright, slowly exhale through your mouth for a count of four, getting all the oxygen out of your lungs and abdomen.

Focus on this intention and be conscious of what you're doing.

Step 2: Hold your breath.

Hold your breath for another count of four.

Step 3: Slowly inhale.

Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose to the count of four. In this step, count to four very slowly in your head.

Feel the air fill your lungs, one section at a time, until your lungs are completely full, and the air moves into your abdomen.

## Organizational Care

**Slide 17:** Many times, professionals deny the symptoms of secondary trauma and continue to work, but without help the symptoms can become debilitating. The responsibility to address secondary trauma should not solely be placed on the trauma worker, but instead should be shared responsibility with the organization where the professional is staffed.

**Slide 18:** Ongoing training on secondary trauma and self-care should be offered throughout the organization to provide continued support services, knowledge, and effective management tools. Organizations that create time and space for workers to connect with each other and acknowledge the

effects of secondary trauma make the work more sustainable. Once secondary trauma leads to burnout, it's common for employees to blame their organization for it. That's why it is important for organizations to actively participate in providing support.

**Slide 19:** Linking Systems of Care, in collaboration with the Montana Board of Crime Control and the University of Montana, developed a template for trauma-informed policy and practice, as well as an organizational trauma-readiness and self-assessment checklist. Organizations are encouraged to conduct the assessment on an annual basis and use it as a means for measuring changes in trauma responsiveness over time.

**Slide 20:** The assessment includes seven modules, each titled after one of the Seven Key Principles of Trauma-Informed Care:

- 1) Adoption of trauma-informed culture that strives to ensure safety and prevent re-traumatization.
- 2) Trustworthiness and transparency.
- 3) Peer Support.
- 4) Collaboration and mutuality.
- 5) Empowerment, voice, and choice.
- 6) A commitment to honoring gender equity and to furthering equity for high-risk populations, including those who are indigenous, LGBTQ+, and who have disabilities.
- 7) Ensuring leadership, administrative support, and policies support trauma-informed care.

To get more information and take the assessment, select this link to [Linking Systems of Care](#).

## Community Care

**Slide 21:** It is not only the individual and the organizational tendencies that impact secondary trauma, but also societal factors. Society-at-large interacts with our trauma exposure response because we are part of a bigger picture. Systematic oppression, historical trauma, and structural violence are ways that trauma affects us individually and collectively and our personal trauma exposure responses are rooted in the larger collective framework. We might benefit from unearned privilege or be harmed by racism or misogyny.

**Slide 22:** In all these facets, the intersection of our own experiences of inequality or disparity are intertwined with those of the people we work with and the ways those populations are viewed by society. Whether society views our work as a burden (caring for the elderly or working with homeless populations) or a heroic endeavor (saving children from burning buildings) impacts our experience of secondary trauma.

## Finish

**Slide 23:** In conclusion, just as survivors of trauma can experience post-traumatic growth, workers who respond to trauma can develop resiliency and deepen their own self-awareness and sustainable way of integrating the meaning of the work they do into their lives more fully.

**Slide 24:** Resources:

[The Montana DOJ's Investigating Sexual Assault Field Guide](#)

[Montana State University: Secondary Trauma in the Workplace](#)

[Successful Trauma Informed Victim Interviewing](#)

[Missoula County Attorney's Office: Secondary Trauma Group](#)

[Diaphragmatic Breathing Infographic to print](#)

[Secondary Trauma-Mindful Strategies to print](#)

[Linking Systems of Care](#)

[Box Breathing Exercise](#)

**Slide 25:** Thank you for completing this course. Select "Close" to exit.