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Building Resiliency: A Guide for Supervisors of Housing and Health Professionals

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HOMELESS & HOUSING RESOURCE CENTER

SAMHSA
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Contents

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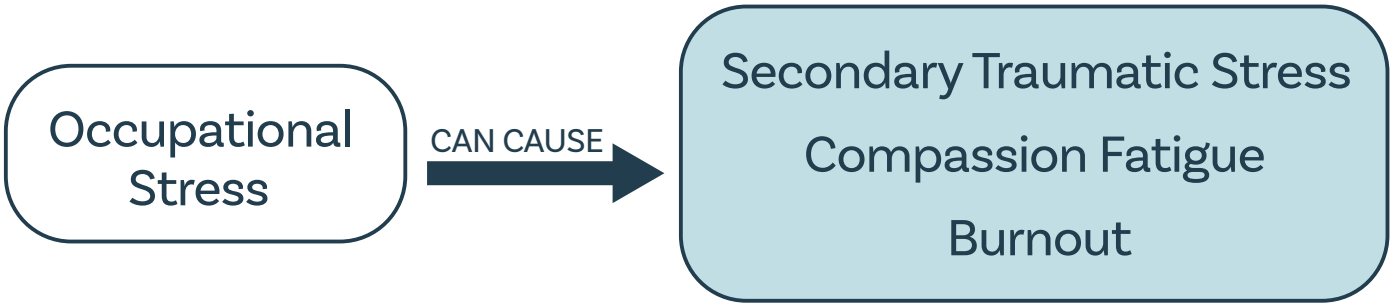
I. Introduction

Every day, countless program staff work with people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Their strengths—passion, compassion, and determination, among others—are the same qualities that may put them at risk for secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue, burnout, and various connected conditions that can develop due to occupational stress (depicted in Figure 1).

Figure 1. Interrelationship of Secondary Traumatic Stress, Compassion Fatigue, and Burnout



Defining Secondary Traumatic Stress, Compassion Fatigue, and Burnout

Secondary traumatic stress may result from being exposed to another person's trauma, experiencing stressors of another's personal history (through the absorption of intense energy and graphic details), and dealing with challenging behaviors. It is the emotional distress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand traumatic experiences of another.

Compassion fatigue[1] refers to the exhaustion that can affect helping professionals and caregivers over time. Compassion fatigue manifests as profound physical, emotional, and spiritual exhaustion. Many people who experience compassion fatigue describe it as being caught in a whirlpool that pulls them slowly downward. They have no idea how to stop the downward spiral, so they do what they have always done—work harder and continue to give to others until they are completely tapped out. They "manage" time by doing many things simultaneously, like eating lunch while completing paperwork, making calls, or returning emails. They often eliminate activities that would be revitalizing, like regular exercise, interests outside of work, relaxed meals, or time with family and friends. Warning signs may include the following:

- → feeling helpless and hopeless
- → being hypervigilant

- having diminished creativity
- being unable to embrace complexity
- downplaying the significance of an event, emotion, or experience
- avoiding social interactions, hobbies, work tasks
- being unable to listen
- experiencing memory lapses
- feeling guilt
- having a lack of empathy

Burnout is a process involving gradually increasing emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It occurs when you feel overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to meet constant demands. You could describe the burnout process as moving from busy (can't stop now) to beat down (can't take this), and finally burnout (can't keep going). In this process, staff may begin to exhibit negative attitudes toward participants, a diminished sense of personal accomplishment, and a reduced commitment to the work. Other signs of burnout include the following:

- thinking the worst in every situation
- reacting disproportionately
- refusing to take a vacation
- declining work performance
- having an increasing number of arguments
- decreasing social life

Secondary traumatic stress, burnout, and compassion fatigue have significant consequences for individuals and organizations. A multidimensional approach to prevention and intervention is essential, involving individual self-care, supportive supervision, and organizational wellness.

Self-care is a critical skill for staff. Caring for oneself is not self-indulgence; it is self-preservation. A worker's ability to practice self-care is influenced by the organization in which they work and the supervision that is provided. An organization's culture and climate can support an individual's self-care efforts, or it can have a detrimental impact, being burdensome, unwelcoming, and unproductive.

This guide is designed to help supervisors to:

- identify approaches for prevention and intervention of secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue, and burnout among your staff;
- enhance staff resiliency;
- support and celebrate health and well-being; and
- explore policies, procedures, and activities to promote organizational wellness and well-being.

The guide is divided into three sections.

1. **Self-Care and Well-Being** *includes strategies for supervisors and tips and hints on managing your work/life balance more effectively.*
2. **Promoting Self-Care and Resilience among Supervisees** *provides practical advice and activities for you as you promote and support self-care among your employees.*
3. **Promoting Organizational Wellness** *highlights policies, procedures, and activities that help create a culture of support and self-care in the 21st-century workplace.*

The guide also contains worksheets and links to other tools and resources.

II. Self-Care and Well-Being: The ABCs

Sometimes we believe that we are too busy taking care of everyone else to worry about taking care of ourselves. Like dripping water from a bucket without replenishing it, eventually, the bucket is empty. In the act of self-preservation, our body will force rest, often through a physical, mental, or emotional illness. **Self-care is not pampering. It is a necessity.** Self-care promotes physical and emotional well-being. It allows us to serve others and to be fully present and energized. Self-care is the antidote to stress. Proper rest, nutrition, exercise, and stress-reduction activities are essential in preventing secondary traumatic stress.

The *ABCs of Self-Care* is a general framework to use when thinking about care and general well-being. It consists of three areas, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. ABCs of Self-Care

How do we manage to stay aware and maintain balance while helping others? Keep reading for some tips and strategies.

Building Your Own Awareness

The first element of the ABC framework is awareness. Building your awareness starts with thinking about self-care and what that means to you.

- → What do you need to do to care for yourself, personally and professionally?
- → How do you define self-care? What are the things that you expect to include in self-care?
- → What is your sense of your own ability to engage in self-care?
- → How have you cared for yourself in the past?
- → What do you know that works for other people?

There are three areas in which to build your awareness:

1. **Physical health.** *Multiple factors impact physical health, including physical activity, nourishment, sleep, medical care, and dental care. These factors are integrated. For example, if you get adequate sleep, you may feel more motivated to exercise. If you eat healthy and nourishing food, you fuel your body in ways that guard against stress.*

2. **Mental health.** *Your emotional and psychological well-being comprise mental health, affecting how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices.*
3. **Relational health.** *Also known as social health, relational health is the capacity to develop and sustain safe, stable, and nurturing relationships. When our relationships are healthy, we have a sense of connection, belonging, and a well-developed support system, which research indicates may prevent extreme or prolonged activation of the body's stress response system.*

There are four fundamental *awareness distortions* to keep in mind:

1. **Sense of unworthiness.** *Feeling unworthy is a significant trap to establishing a healthy self-care routine. This underlying sense of worthlessness impedes one's motivation to take good care of oneself. Understanding our own worthiness and learning to have a loving relationship with ourselves will motivate us to take better care of ourselves. We can learn to feel good about ourselves not because we are special and above average but because we are human beings intrinsically worthy of respect.*
2. **Self-neglect.** *Self-neglect is an obstacle to feeling motivated to care for oneself that can manifest in many ways, including constantly putting yourself down, eating poorly, not getting enough rest, or constantly putting others first.*
3. **Harsh or critical perspective of self.** *Self-compassion is about being kind to ourselves when situations in life do not go the way we planned or when we notice something about ourselves we do not like. Instead of being harsh or critical of ourselves, we can recognize that we are human, which means imperfection. This way, we feel connected to others when we fail or suffer, rather than feeling separate or isolated. It also involves recognizing and accepting uncomfortable or painful emotions as they come up. Rather than ignoring our pain or making it into an exaggeration, we see ourselves and our situation clearly.*
4. **Fear of being viewed as self-centered.** *Self-care and self-love are different from self-centeredness. Making a conscious effort to love oneself is a critical part of well-being.*

Developing Balance

The second element of the ABC framework is balance. What is the sweet spot where you can balance your personal and professional responsibilities, and prioritize self-care? You need to care for yourself professionally while at work, *and* you need to be able to rest, play, enjoy life, and find satisfaction.

At work, self-care is not always about taking a break; it is also about finding balance in what you do. Different tasks require different energy and focus. Finding a good mix of activities that we do throughout the day or throughout the week—diversifying tasks, starting with the most critical work, or scheduling longer blocks of time to focus—can help you balance your workload. Making even one small shift can make a difference.

Where are you doing well with self-care, and where might you have room to grow?

ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

Healthy boundaries define the quality of our relationships, protect our personal values, and reinforce autonomy. Some common types of boundaries are listed below.

Time. Ensuring that you take short breaks during your workday, away from work projects, can be a way of setting boundaries, as can safeguarding your personal (non-work) time. Regaining control over your time, setting time boundaries, and recalculating what you need to do to maintain them are steps toward well-being.

Words/your truth. Having healthy boundaries means saying what you mean and being clear on what is acceptable. Your words let people know where you stand and give them a sense of your values. This means finding respectful ways to tell your truth. There isn't always safety in the truth—yet it is important for boundary setting.

Physical distance. Sometimes placing physical distance between yourself and others is what you need to do to be true to yourself. You might need to have just a bit more distance to feel comfortable engaging with someone else. Or you might need to step away from an engagement to help replenish yourself when you feel your ability to enforce your boundaries is shaky.

Emotional distance. People often feel that they must be emotionally present all the time, but the ability to emotionally distance yourself from an uncomfortable situation until you are ready to sort it out is very healthy. Think of emotional distance as a temporary boundary. This might be a time out to process raw emotions. Take the time to feel your feelings and work them out, then reengage when you feel ready.

Consequences. Consequences can give some good "barbs" to fences. Be clear about the consequences if someone crosses a boundary you have established with them. Consequences determine the seriousness of a particular trespass and the amount of respect you have for yourself. Before you state the consequences, ask yourself if you will follow through.

Sometimes the boundary is so "big" that we may need to employ a friend or family member to help us set and maintain it. Having others help with boundary setting can remind you that you are not alone in making hard decisions.

Boundary setting with co-workers

Managing professional boundaries can be challenging. It involves balancing personal values with the organization's expectations and policies and getting clarity on all of them.

Unplug and turn off work. Do you use work email or voicemail on your personal device? Are there receptionists or call centers that handle off-hours or emergency calls? Do you have hotlines or warm lines to which you can refer people via your voicemail when you are not working? Sometimes it is tempting to deviate from these and always be on call. It may feel like you are not committed to your work if you avoid taking a call late at night or on the weekend. Remember, at some point, you will not be available when an individual is in need—and that is okay when there are other resources to assist.

Develop a healthy working relationship with your co-workers. The people you work with don't need to be your friends, but close workplace alliances can be invaluable in coping with the stresses of service work. If you have solid relationships with your co-workers, they can assist you in thinking through boundary-related questions and other issues that arise.

Use supervision to help you determine appropriate professional boundaries to handle any challenging situation. Establish and maintain an ongoing dialogue about your workload. If you run into complex problems or are unsure how to handle something, rely on your supervisor to guide and support you.

Be attuned to workplace bullying. Everyone deserves the same respect and dignity in the work environment you offer your co-workers and those you serve. If you witness any inequality in how someone is treated in your workplace, bring that to your supervisor right away. People with healthy professional boundaries stand up when someone crosses the line of decency.

Boundary setting with program participants

It is important to keep a close watch on your behavior crossing the line from serving to rescuing in service work. Are you devoting extra time to a particular individual? Although some people require more energy than others, treating one person differently might be a cue that your boundaries are overextended. Assess whether your devotion aligns with your role in supporting the individual to build on their strengths, your job description, the scope of support work that your program does, and the organization's mission.

Exceeding your professional boundaries with participants sets you, your colleagues, and the organization up for failure. If you make special exceptions with the people you serve, you create an unfair expectation that your co-workers will do the same. A breach of boundaries can confuse the individual and erode their confidence in your organization.

COPING WITH STRESS AND BUILDING RESILIENCE

Stress is a part of everyday life. There are many instances when stress can be helpful. A fire alarm is intended to cause stress that alerts you to avoid danger. The stress created by a due date to finish a paper can motivate you to complete the assignment on time. Positive stress can help improve performance, increase motivation, and facilitate better adaptability in reacting to one's environment. But when experienced in excess, stress has the opposite effect. It can harm our emotional and physical health and limit our ability to function.[2]

Whether stress is acute or chronic, people have the same automatic response to it—psychological arousal that includes:

- → increased heart rate and blood pressure,
- → slowed digestive functioning,
- → decreased blood flow to the extremities,
- → increased release of hormones like adrenaline and cortisol, and
- → other responses preparing the body to fight or run.

When the stress response is triggered multiple times throughout a day, and the relaxation response does not have a chance to follow, the body is in a constant state of physiological arousal over perceived threats, leading to negative consequences.

We experience stress when we do not believe that our resources for coping are enough to meet the demands of the situation. The good news is that there is much we can do to manage stress by learning and practicing specific stress-reduction strategies. And there is a parallel process here: After you teach yourself to relax and reduce stress, you can pass the information on to your staff and program participants. See

Appendix 1: De-stressing Strategies for Wellness and Resilience for tips and techniques. You will also find links to self-care resources in *Appendix 2: Self-Care and Resilience Resources*.

Creating Connections

The third element of the ABC framework is connection, both with self and with others. How do you connect internally with your thoughts and emotions, and what is happening internally in your own body? What are your perceptions of the world around you?

What is your connection to others? Increasingly, research tells us how vital meaningful relationships with other people are for our overall health and well-being. When we are socially isolated or experience loneliness that is pervasive over time, our overall health is harmed. Our bodies experience biological changes that mimic the responses we would have going through chronic stress or traumatic experiences. Our bodies react on a cellular level when we are not connected to other people. There is inflammation in our cells and increased cortisol and adrenaline pumping through our body, leading to insulin resistance, cardiovascular problems, and problems that impact all the major systems of the body.

In thinking about connection, consider the following:

- → How do you have and build those meaningful connections?
- → How do you embrace having conversations with people, touching base, and finding common ground or things to do with others?
- → How do you connect with colleagues or co-workers throughout the workday in meaningful ways as part of self-care?

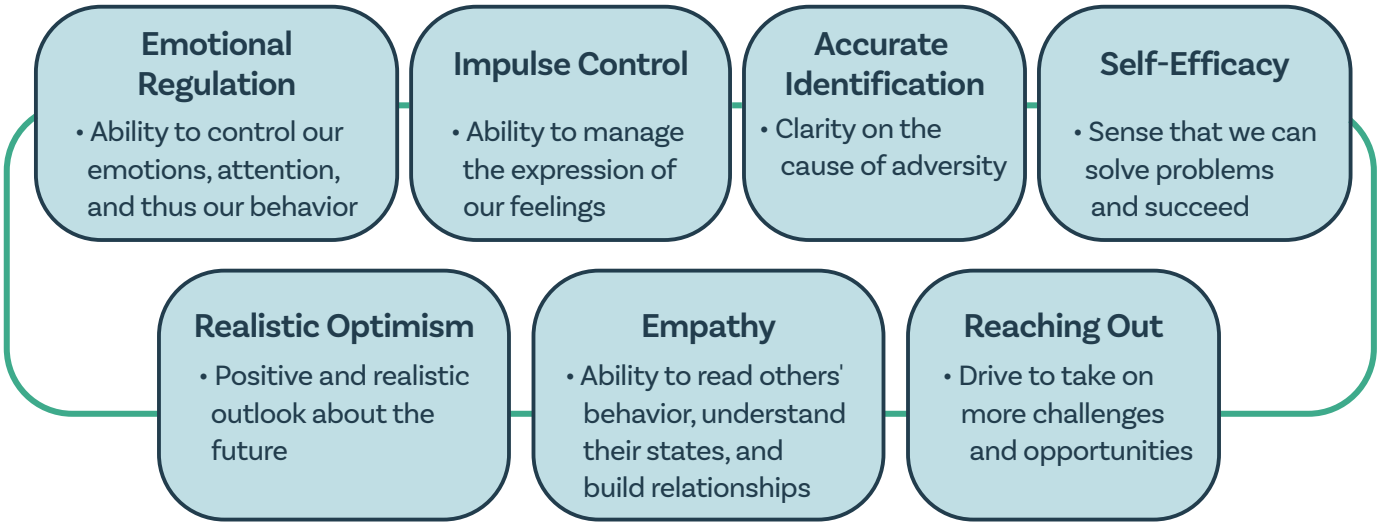
Awareness, *balance*, and *connection*—the ABCs are building blocks. If you focus on all three, you will move toward enhancing your job and life satisfaction, building healthy support systems, and maintaining more restorative practices for self-care and well-being.

III. Promoting Self-Care and Resilience Among Supervisees

First and foremost, supervision is the process of providing support so that staff can be successful in their roles and responsibilities, whatever that entails. Supervision is an opportunity to promote healthy working relationships, boundaries, and growth opportunities. Staff self-care (or lack thereof) impacts every area of work. Encouraging self-care is an integral part of that supervision and can happen in many ways—formally and informally.

Supervisors provide feedback, help problem solve, facilitate brainstorming, provide reassurance around things that are happening, offer new ideas, and help reduce stress wherever possible. One of the many goals of supervision is to help employees enhance their resiliency. Resiliency can be defined as the ability to adapt well to stress, adversity, trauma, or tragedy or as the capability to cope successfully with significant change, adversity, or risk. There are seven core elements of resilience, as summarized in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Elements of Individual Resiliency



Strengths-based supervision is one way to build resiliency among staff. There are three general elements of strengths-based supervision: (1) supportive, (2) educative, and (3) administrative—all three help to support employee resiliency and self-care in different ways, as summarized in Figure 4.

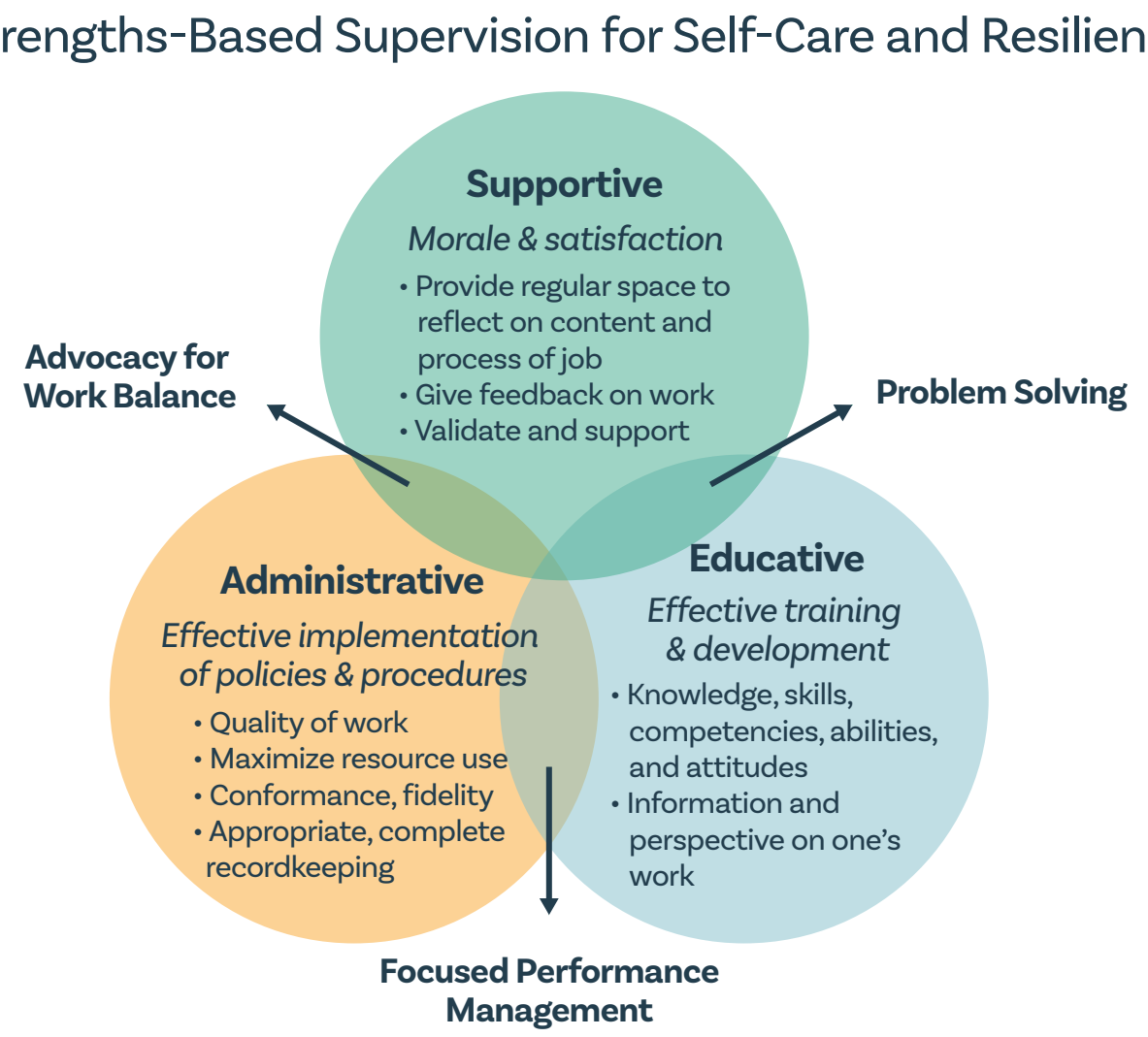
Supportive supervision helps to foster high morale and satisfaction. Supportive supervision allows individuals to reflect on their work and receive feedback, validation, and support. Supportive supervision can help decrease job stress that might interfere with work performance. It provides nurturing conditions that encourage self-efficacy and success. In supportive supervision, you help staff achieve focus and direction; offer support around goal setting, problem-solving, and boundary setting; and make space for strategizing about self-care.

Educative supervision ensures effective training and development. It includes providing regular space and time for supervision work, teaching and modeling skills, and providing consistent opportunities to develop knowledge, skills, and competencies. Educative supervision ensures that staff members have the core competencies needed to get their jobs done successfully. It encompasses training, coaching, and professional development. It also includes processes for giving regular feedback, both positive and

constructive. It can also involve directly demonstrating and modeling self-care or providing information on your employee assistance program and other resources when staff may need professional help.

Administrative supervision promotes the effective implementation of policies and procedures and conformance to standards for high-quality practice. In addition to working with supervisees to improve their practices, administration supervision also includes advocating for organizational policy and practice changes to support efficient and effective work. Administrative supervision focuses on accurately implementing all the organization's policies, procedures, and protocols. When new policies are put into place, the supervisor is responsible for informing the team, managing change, and addressing any issues. Administrative supervision also includes accountability, quality assurance, and performance evaluation. Lastly, administrative supervision includes resource monitoring and management, time management, and caseload management to prevent staff from being overburdened.

Figure 4. Elements of Strengths-Based Supervision (adapted from Smith, 2011[3]; Hawkins & Shohet, 2007[4]; Kadushin, 1992[5]).



A good supervisor doesn't have to know everything about resiliency and self-care. Supervision is about seeking information, working processes, finding solutions together, and ultimately, role modeling self-care.

Supervision Tasks That Support Self-Care and Resilience

Supervisors do several vital functions that help prevent secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue, or burnout—and intervene when someone they supervise is experiencing them.

Build an environment of trust and safety. Understand and appreciate the importance of relationships in building trust. When people intentionally build social ties at work, trust increases, and improved performance follows. Create an environment that fosters this type of relationship building. Schedule time for social interaction and team building inside and outside of the normal workday. Make it okay to have fun and be individual.

Encourage discussion of issues. Although not all decisions can be made democratically, involving people in as many processes as possible can be extremely empowering and promotes personal confidence. Supervisors should also prioritize transparency.

Structure supervision to include time to talk about self-care. Many topics are covered as a part of supervision. One general principle often used in health and social service settings is the 60/20/20 rule: in a supervision session, 60 percent of the time focuses on what is going well and what has been challenging in working with program participants; 20 percent focuses on task management and skill-building (such as data collection and reporting or learning an evidence-based practice); and 20 on passing along information to develop knowledge and skills. Self-care can be addressed in different ways in each part of the supervision session, using reflective questions or appreciative inquiry prompts. Table 1 provides some examples.

Table 1. Sample Supervision Questions/Prompts

Supportive

- → Go for the strength
- → Collect what is important
- → Reflect on challenges
- → Identify solutions

- → What are your main hopes/goals/aims for our session today?
- → What has been going well since the last time we met?
- → What items do you have to discuss related to your work with participants? Any pressing issues?
- → What is particularly challenging for you right now?
- → Where can I help?
- → What do we want to brainstorm about?
- → What plans might we make for you to try between now and when we meet?
- → What can you appreciate about your work this week?
- → What items might we discuss about self-care?
- → What else do you need from me?

Supportive

Additional supportive questions you can ask supervisees when staff members describe having a strong reaction to something, feeling stuck, ruminating about a specific interaction or event, or feeling triggered by a person or situation.

- How did you feel?
- What did you notice in yourself?
- How do you think [other person in interaction] was feeling? What was their perspective?
- What did you think was going to happen? Why do you think it did or didn't go as planned?
- What do you think was driving your stress reaction?
- Are there aspects of the interaction that remind you of your own experiences or history? How might this have influenced you?

Administrative

- Identify accomplishments
- Reflect on barriers to task completion
- Identify practical steps to address barriers

- What key tasks have you accomplished since the last time we met?
- What barriers have you experienced in completing tasks efficiently or effectively?
- What items do you have to discuss related to workload? Core tasks? Time management?
- What items should be on my radar related to your workload? Core tasks? Timelines?
- How do you balance self-care with your work responsibilities?

Educative

- Reflect on staff role
- Notice positive changes in knowledge, demonstrated skills, and ways they respond to challenges
- Explore areas for growth, development, and improvement
- Identify goals and resources for growth and development

- In which areas of your work do you feel the most competent and confident?
- Since [timeframe], what new skills, strategies, or strengths have you developed?
- When things have been most challenging, what skills, strategies, and strengths have you used to keep going?
- How can our supervision help you to continue developing these skills or acquiring new knowledge and skills?

Building a regular conversation about self-care into supervision sessions normalizes thinking about self-care—and allows you and staff to work through issues before they become performance problems. You might check in with staff about their stress level, discuss the impact of stress on well-being, and offer resources for self-care if requested.

Help achieve and maintain quality work. Set realistic goals, collaborate whenever possible, facilitate a successful working/learning environment, help to problem-solve and troubleshoot, and provide continual constructive feedback.

Help manage boundaries. Overlapping responsibilities and duties within an organization are common, but clearly and precisely defined roles and boundaries help alleviate misunderstandings and stress.

Model self-care behaviors. Respected supervisors who practice self-care will, through their actions, influence others to do the same. The desire to "give back" when doing this work often leads to poor role modeling from supervisors. The desire to "be there for everyone, all the time" can take a toll on anyone. Committing to having a healthy balance will help both you and your team.

Help manage change. Change is inevitable. By role modeling how to manage change effectively, you can help your team adapt. Effective management can include:

- → creating and showing a process for breaking down the problem or task into smaller, more manageable parts,
- → prioritizing the change-management steps, and
- → creating a constant flow of communication and updates regarding the change.

Supervision is an opportunity for an organization to reinvest in its workforce, but it is only one part of the organizational commitment to a healthy, productive staff. In the next section, we consider other dimensions.

IV. Promoting Organizational Wellness

What comprises a healthy organization? An organization that is filled with engaged, effective, productive, and satisfied staff.

Organizational Wellness: Promoting Self-Care

In many organizations, the focus is on individual wellness without considering the overarching role of the workplace in wellness. The organizational culture, climate, and processes also matter. If the organization is unhealthy, employees will struggle to maintain their personal wellness. Sustained personal wellness requires healthy organizational development that promotes well-being and resilience.

The ABCs of self-care and well-being—*awareness*, *balance*, and *connection*—can be applied to an organization. *Organizational awareness* starts with understanding your organization's lived and experienced values, culture, and climate and how well those support organizational wellness (or not). How does everyone—leadership, staff, participants—experience your organization?

Organizational balance ensures that the values, culture, and climate align with organizational wellness—and allows individual balance to thrive. A balanced organization is one in which expectations for achieving purpose are clear and reasonable, the climate is warm and welcoming, and the culture is compassionate.

Organizational connection reflects how the organization brings pieces together into a common whole—connecting individual tasks to the overarching purpose, fostering relationships among colleagues and between departments, and demonstrating how the organization's work furthers the field.

Consistently focusing on the ABCs can help your organization to determine what it can do next to further organizational wellness: It can help you to see what you need to keep doing, change doing, start doing, or stop doing.

COMPASSIONATE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Every workplace has a culture—a set of group expectations, behavioral norms, and social customs that governs what goes on and how it is interpreted. Developing an employee-focused culture is how employees feel that they are valued and "belong."

Culture is the personality of an organization. A person's personality is composed of the values, beliefs, underlying assumptions, interests, experiences, upbringing, and habits that create the person's behavior.

Making wellness a significant focus of organizational culture assists staff in self-care practices. If a workplace says self-care is important, but leaders are not role-modeling, policies are not in place, and there is an unspoken belief or attitude that does not reflect a culture of wellness, it will not become part of the culture.

WHY BURNOUT HAPPENS: ORGANIZATIONAL CONTRIBUTORS

Burnout is not simply a result of long hours. It is associated with a work environment that makes high demands on employees but offers limited support and rewards. Cynicism, depression, and lethargy of burnout often occur when workers:

- → are not in control of how they carry out their jobs;
- → are working toward goals that do not resonate with them;
- → are dealing with excessive demands;
- → have limited social support;
- → receive limited feedback;
- → have role ambiguity;
- → have a clear but unfulfilling role; or
- → have limited or inadequate resources to fulfill their role.

Conversely, employees who feel valued by the organization, feel supported in their work, believe they have the resources to do their jobs, and believe that their voice and work matters are more likely to engage in the self-care needed to continue doing their work.

ADDRESSING BURNOUT: THE EMPLOYEE PROTECTION PLAN

What can organizations do to prevent burnout? Put an "employee protection plan" into place to align organizational policy and practice with what we know works to promote wellness. Table 2 summarizes the recommended elements to address in the plan.

Table 2. Employee Protection Plan

Organizational Element	Organizational Policy/Practice
Create a strengths-based environment and culture.	→ Value your staff—provide unconditional high regard → Encourage individuals to identify personal strengths and skills → Provide opportunities to grow → Give rewards and awards
Be realistic and reasonable while being attentive to results	→ Maintain high expectations while also setting a reasonable workload, pace, and hours → Establish policy and protocol for handling calls or emails outside of working hours. → Support (and model) boundary-setting → Check assumptions about the time and effort required to complete work tasks (don't underestimate); observe and ask questions about what tasks truly entail

Organizational Element	Organizational Policy/Practice
Enhance structure and culture for balance	→ Allow self-care breaks during the day → Schedule mental health days → Develop flexible personal time-off policies → Provide adequate reflective supervision; incorporate resilience-building into individual and group supervisory activities
Equip the team with the right tools and resources	→ Build skills for managing the professional self → Provide and optimize supervision → Provide positive reinforcement and clear, consistent feedback → Train organizational leaders and staff on stress, trauma, and self-care → Provide ongoing assessment of staff risk for burnout and compassion fatigue, and measures of staff resilience
Foster connections, commitment, mutuality, and cohesion	→ Initiate friendly conversations → Meet with your team regularly → Organize team-building events → Make work meaningful—structure jobs to include meaningful tasks and clarify how jobs and functions support the organizational mission
Build trust and transparency	→ Encourage your employees to speak up → Encourage autonomy → Encourage flexibility (and be flexible)

There are good reasons to put the elements of an employee protection plan into place: They protect your staff, those you serve, and the organization. They also foster high morale, high staff retention, and high productivity.

While the executive leadership of an organization sets the policies and tone for organizational wellness, supervisors at all levels can play an important role. First, they can help leadership to better understand the task and workload challenges and administrative and resource needs of frontline staff. Second, they can routinely put elements into practice by using strengths-based supervision strategies and modeling the practices in their work.

Organizational Resilience: Promoting Resilience Through Trauma-Informed Approaches

There are also things that organizations can do to address and mitigate secondary traumatic stress and compassion fatigue. Like individuals, organizations can be resilient and can build resiliency. Organizational resilience is an organization's ability to anticipate, prepare for, respond to, and adapt to incremental change and sudden disruptions to survive and prosper. It is grounded in a learning culture that supports positive adjustment and adaptation. The key characteristics of resilient organizations are summarized in Figure 5.

Figure 5. British Standards Institution. 2018. Organizational Resilience Pocket Guide[6]

In helping professions and service organizations, one additional framework is essential for organizational wellness that deepens the ABCs and builds resilience—the *trauma-informed organization*.

PRINCIPLES OF TRAUMA-INFORMED ORGANIZATIONS

Trauma has impacts on different levels. It affects how we look at and interpret the world and shapes our beliefs and identity. Program participants are not the only ones who experience trauma—either primary or secondary. Often, staff members have their own traumatic histories, which can create situations where they may avoid re-experiencing traumatic emotions, respond personally to others' emotional states, or perceive the behavior of others as a personal threat or provocation.

A trauma-informed organization acknowledges the widespread impact of trauma, recognizes and addresses the signs and symptoms of trauma, and responds by integrating knowledge of trauma into its policies, procedures, and practices. This is not just a checklist of things to do to be "trauma-informed;" it means incorporating an understanding of trauma and its effects into the organization's culture.

Trauma-informed organizations support hope and healing and promote overall community wellness. They see themselves as part of their community and extend the principles for working in the community to their staff as members of the community. A program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed:

- realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery;
- recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in individuals, families, staff, and others involved with the system;
- resists re-traumatization; and
- responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, practices, and settings.[7]

Such programs also:

- recognize the impact of secondary trauma on the workforce;
- recognize that exposure to trauma is a risk in the job of serving traumatized children and families;
- understand that trauma can shape the culture of organizations in the same way that trauma shapes the worldview of individuals; and
- develop and implement workforce policies that support trauma-informed approaches.

Trauma-informed principles help to build organizational resilience and compassionate organizational culture.

Defining trauma

Individual trauma results from an **event**, series of events, or set of circumstances experienced by an individual as overwhelming or life-changing and has profound **effects** on the individual's psychological development or well-being, often involving a physiological, social, and/or spiritual impact.

A key trauma-informed principle for resiliency is safety. Throughout the organization, staff, and the people they serve, whether children or adults, should feel physically and psychologically safe. The physical setting is safe and interpersonal interactions promote a sense of safety. Figure 6 summarizes the types of safety that are important.

Figure 6. Types of Safety

These types of safety foster an environment in which resiliency can grow and thrive.

Other principles/factors. Three other principles are put into practice in trauma-informed organizations.

1. **Trustworthiness and transparency.** *Operations and decisions are conducted with transparency and the goal of building and maintaining trust among individuals, family members, staff, and others involved with the organization.*
2. **Empowerment, voice, and choice.** *A person's strengths and experiences are recognized, validated, and built upon.*
3. **Collaboration and mutuality.** *Power differences between staff and participants and among the organizational team are diminished*

V. Conclusion

Resiliency-building occurs on multiple levels: the individual, the supervisory, and the organizational. It is a shared responsibility that is vital, especially when working with individuals experiencing barriers to housing stability. The commitment that you and your staff have to the work are qualities that may put you at risk for burnout and resulting health problems.

Using the strategies discussed in this guide will equip you with the necessary skills and tools for enhancing resiliency. The practices explored will help support and foster health and well-being within your workforce and promote overall organizational wellness.

Continual self-care is an ever-changing process that requires reflection, commitment, and perseverance. When done well, its benefits ripple and expand beyond the individual to the organization, program participants, and community.

VI. References

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Appendix I: De-stressing Strategies for Wellness and Resilience

Wellness Strategies: Eating, Moving, Sleeping

NOURISHMENT AND NUTRITION

Nourishment is the food and other substances necessary for growth, health, and good condition. In the short term, poor nutrition can contribute to stress and tiredness and reduce your capacity to work. Over time, it can contribute to the risk of developing some illnesses and other health problems. When we don't get adequate nourishment, our bodies and minds cannot work at full capacity. Insufficient nourishment can include under or over-eating, not having enough of the healthy foods we need each day, skipping meals, eating packaged foods, or consuming too many foods and drinks low in fiber or high in fat, salt, and sugar.

Quite simply, eating better helps us feel better, which helps us deal with stress more effectively. In his book *Food Rules: An Eater's Manual*, Michael Pollan[i] outlined a plan for sensible eating: Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants. Some other tips include the following:

- → Eat unprocessed (things not from a package)—if it came from a plant, eat it; if it was made in a plant (aka food product, imitation foods), eat it sparingly.
- → Eat colorfully.
- → Shop the outside aisle at the grocery store.
- → Divide your plate.
- → Consider your portions and eat slowly.
- → Cook for yourself or with others—collaborate on cooking healthful foods.
- → Participate in/start a community garden.
- → Offer healthy food options at work events.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Like with healthy eating, we've all heard about the benefits of physical activity, even 10 minutes per day. The kind of activity is not so important; being active is. Every bit of movement counts toward the goal of 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise (like walking, yoga, or bicycling) per week. Adding a small change will improve health, and small steps can lead to big changes.

A vast body of research confirms that regular exercise can reduce stress, brighten your mood, sharpen mental functioning, help you sleep better, and control weight. There are four components to a well-rounded exercise routine: aerobic activity, strength training, flexibility training, and balance exercises. Each benefits your body differently.

Research also emphasizes the risk of sitting for extended periods. Following are some tips for when you are at a desk or the office.

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i Michael Pollan, *Food Rules,* London: Penguin Books, 2009.

- → Set a timer to remind you to take time to stretch your legs and move at regular intervals. Incorporate chair exercises.
- → Have walking meetings (walk while talking).
- → Stand up when you're talking on the phone.
- → Create walking "tracks" in your building.
- → Mark out walking trails in the neighborhood.

SLEEP

Getting a good night's sleep is an essential component of self-care. Most adults need 7 or more hours of good-quality sleep each night. The health benefits of sleep are well researched. Sleep reduces stress and improves mood; enhances cognition, allowing you to think more clearly; and lowers the risk of serious health problems.

From time to time, everyone has less sleep than they need. Individuals eventually can recover from the missed sleep and feel in balance again, but sleep deprivation that lasts more than a few days is detrimental to your well-being. When deprived of sleep, your brain can't function properly, affecting your cognitive abilities and emotional state. If it continues long enough, it can lower your body's defenses, putting you at risk of developing chronic illness. The more obvious signs of sleep deprivation are excessive sleepiness, yawning, and irritability. Chronic sleep deprivation can interfere with balance, coordination, and decision-making abilities.

Sleep issues happen for many reasons. Sometimes, it is related to physical or mental wellness. Other times it is related to stress, racing thoughts, or hyperactivity. Or it can be related to things that we do leading up to and right before bedtime. Whether you're having trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or sleeping too much, there are things you can do to improve your sleep. Changes in behavior to improve the sleep process are called sleep hygiene; these are your behaviors before bedtime and before sleeping, allowing you to get the best and most optimal sleep. Even if you aren't having sleep trouble now, it is good to reevaluate your sleep hygiene.

- → **Exercise—but not right before bedtime.** Regular exercise has been shown to help one fall asleep and stay asleep. People who exercise regularly are more likely to sleep better. Adding even a 10-minute walk every day improves one's likelihood of getting a good night's rest.
- → **Take a hot shower or bath.** Bathing helps your body to relax. Then, when your body temperature falls, your body feels more lethargic; that natural decrease in metabolic activity aids in falling asleep.
- → **Create a comfortable sleep environment.** Make sure your bedroom is dark, quiet, and cool. Research shows that the ideal bedroom temperature for sleeping is 65–72 degrees Fahrenheit. Too hot or too cold will make it harder to sleep well.
- → **Set a bedtime routine.** Think about what you do before bedtime and create a routine or ritual to wind down. This prepares your body for sleep. For example, brush your teeth, put on your pajamas, put your devices to bed in another room, turn down your blankets, fluff your pillow, and then get into bed at the same time every night.

There are few bedtime "no-nos"—things to avoid close to bedtime that might disrupt your sleep.

- **Taking long naps.** Taking a short nap is okay, but no longer than a 20-minute power nap. Anything longer will make it hard to fall asleep at night. If you have been struggling with falling asleep at night, you may want to avoid napping until you are back on a regular sleep pattern.
- **Eating.** Although you don't want to go to bed hungry, which can also wake the body up and cause a restless night, you want to think about eating early enough to be satiated but not full right before bedtime. When your body is digesting food, your heart rate increases to metabolize that food, increasing the frequency of waking up during the night; Make sure you've eaten an hour or more before bedtime.
- **Drinking caffeine.** Caffeine makes you feel more alert by blocking sleep-inducing chemicals in the brain and increasing adrenaline production. Consuming any caffeine before bed will leave you tossing and turning for hours.
- **Drinking alcohol.** Although alcohol sometimes can help you relax, it also can diminish your quality of sleep. It increases the frequency of waking up during the night, and it lessens the time spent in REM sleep, which is your most restorative phase of sleep. If you have a drink, make sure to have it early enough for your body to metabolize it well before bedtime.
- **Using computers or smartphones, watching TV, or playing video games close to bedtime.** The blue light that comes from your electronics can impact your ability to sleep and sleep well. The devices also stimulate our brain, keeping us awake. Consider keeping electronic devices—TVs, computers, and smartphones—out of your bedroom.
- **Falling asleep with TV or radio on.** Even though you are not consciously aware of it, while sleeping, your body perceives the visuals and sounds around you, stimulating the mind and disrupting sleep. If you usually use the sound of TV, radio, or sound device to fall asleep, consider putting it on a sleep timer to shut it off early in your sleep.
- **Lying awake in bed.** If you have trouble falling asleep and are still awake after staying in bed for more than 20 minutes, get up and do something relaxing until you feel sleepy. (Don't turn on a bunch of lights, and don't do things that will stimulate or wake you up further.)

Resilience Strategies: Stress Reduction and Relaxation

Everyone experiences stress from time to time. When we feel stressed, it takes a toll on our emotional state and physical well-being. There are connections between stress and hypertension, heart problems, being overweight, diabetes—the list goes on. It is essential to think about what you can do to manage stress.

Your brain is incapable of feeling stress and relaxation at the same time. It is an amazing organ, capable of overriding stress with some simple processes. You can train your brain to de-stress with relaxation techniques. Even 5 or 10 minutes of relaxation per day helps give your brain and, therefore, your body a break from stress, which helps reduce cortisol levels and other elevated stress-related hormones in our body.[ii]

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ii Scott, Elizabeth. "What Is the Relaxation Response." *VeryWell* (blog), December 30, 2015. https://www.verywell.com/what-is-the-relaxation-response-3145145.

There are “everyday ways” to relax at home. Create a list for yourself—or add to your list if you already have one. Some common everyday ways to relax include the following:

- taking a bath
- watching a movie
- knitting
- exercising
- playing sports
- doing a hobby

There are different techniques for grounding yourself when you are hyper-aroused or anxious, such as:

- holding a pillow, a stuffed animal, or a ball
- placing a cool cloth on your face
- holding something cool against your skin
- snapping an elastic band lightly
- practicing a sensory touch that helps you to come back to the present or be a bit more focused
- listening to soothing music
- putting your feet firmly on the ground

There are also guided stress-reduction interventions such as diaphragmatic breathing, visualization or guided imagery, progressive muscle relaxation, and meditation.

You will want to use different techniques at different times of the day or for distinct types of stress. For example, suppose you are having trouble falling asleep at night. In that case, you want something that will not energize you, so deep breathing or progressive muscle relaxation is most appropriate.

There are also ways to reduce stress while at work. Table A summarizes a few recovery strategies to try.

Table A. Stress Management at Work (adapted from Volk et al., 2008).[iii]

If you have...	You can take a...
2–3 minutes	**Micro-Break** → Sit and relax in a quiet space, breathing deeply → Do a quick at-your-desk stretch → Move your body to one song on your phone (or radio) → Listen to a song you enjoy
5–10 minutes	**Mini-Break** → Get water, coffee, or tea → Have a healthy snack → Do quick meditation or other mindfulness practice (smartphone apps are great to help with this) → Chat with a co-worker → Do chair yoga → Do a 7-minute workout
15 minutes	**Midi-Break** → Take a quick walk around the block → Clean up your workspace → Do some deep stretching → Read, listen to a podcast, or audiobook
30 minutes	**Full-Stop Break** → Eat a healthy lunch → Take a longer walk outside → Sit outside, engage all five senses → Take no more than a 20-minute nap

iii Katherine T. Volk, Kathleen Guarino, Megan Edson Grandin, and Rose Clervil, *What About You? A Workbook for Those Who Work with Others*, The National Center on Family Homelessness (2008).

Appendix II: Self-Care and Resilience Resources

Awareness

- Self-Care Assessment Tool. HHRC. [PDF]
- Creating a Healthier Life: A Step-by-Step Guide to Wellness. SAMHSA. [PDF]
- The Self-Care Wheel. Olga Phoenix. [HTML]
- Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale. [PDF]
- Maslach Burnout Inventory. [PDF]
- What About You? A Workbook for Those Who Work with Others. National Center on Family Homelessness. [PDF]

Balance

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- Move Your Way Activity Planner. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. [HTML]
- Why We Should Exercise—And Why We Don't. Harvard. [Article]

STRESS MANAGEMENT

- Practice STOPP. National Council for Mental Wellbeing. [PDF]
- Coping Strategies. National Council for Mental Wellbeing. [PDF]

RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

- Mindful Breathing for Stress Management. HHRC. [Videos]
- Pause, Reset, Nourish. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. [PDF]

COMPASSION RESILIENCE

- Compassion Resilience Assessment. National Council for Mental Wellbeing. [PDF]
- Compassion Resilience Toolkit. [HTML]
- Self-Care Tools. Professional Quality of Life. [HTML]

Supervision

REFLECTIVE, STRENGTHS-BASED SUPERVISION

- Reflective Practice and Reflective Supervision. Zero to Three. [Webinar]
- Reflective Supervision: A Systems Approach. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. [Webinar]

SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS CORE COMPETENCIES

- Using the Secondary Traumatic Stress Core Competencies in Trauma-informed Supervision. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. [PDF]
- Secondary Traumatic Stress Core Competencies in Trauma-Informed Supervision Self-Rating Tool. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. [PDF]
- Secondary Traumatic Stress Informed Organization Assessment Tool. The University of Kentucky Center on Trauma and Children. [HTML]

Appendix III: Glossary of Common Terms

Burnout	A state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. A condition of physical, emotional, and spiritual depletion brought on by involvement over prolonged periods with demanding people and situations.
Compassion fatigue	A state experienced by those helping people or animals in distress; it is an extreme state of tension and preoccupation with the suffering of those being helped to the degree that it can create secondary traumatic stress for the helper.[i]
Stress	Discrepancy between the demands on the individual and the individual's ability to respond. Prolonged stress can be detrimental to one's equilibrium and sense of well-being.
Self-care	Process of replenishing the self—body, mind, spirit—to avoid exhaustion and depletion.
Mindfulness	A type of awareness in which an individual is fully conscious and in-the-moment. At the time, emotions, thoughts, and physical sensations are experienced without judgment. It believes in cultivating awareness of the self and the world and being more in tune with one's mind and body (Christopher & Maris, 2010).
Organizational wellness	Activities or policies designed to encourage healthy behaviors in the workplace with the goal of improving healthy employee living. Wellness in the workplace begins with the organization's leadership.
Organizational resilience	Organizational resilience is an organization's ability to anticipate, prepare for, respond to, and adapt to incremental change and sudden disruptions to survive and prosper.
Wellness	Being aware of ourselves as whole people, including a sense of balance and contentment. The feeling that things are going well and can continue to go well. Wellness encompasses significant relationships.
Workplace culture	Values, beliefs, and principles—formal and informal, spoken and unspoken, conscious and unconscious—that serve as the foundation for an organization's management system and the practices and behaviors that exemplify and reinforce those basic principles.

i Charles R. Figley, *Compassion Fatigue: Coping with Secondary Stress Disorder in Those Who Treat the Traumatized* (New York: Brunner/Routledge, 1995).