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Review Responsibility: Board and Administrative Policies Committee

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FCCS Procedure

NO.: 4J

**SUBJECT: CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT
AND SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS
POLICY**

Approved by: Executive Council

Effective Date: January 1, 2001

Date(s) of Revision: Apr 1, 2003; Sep 1, 2009; Dec 17, 2012; Apr 21, 2015; Jan 15, 2019

Responsible for Implementation: All Staff

Critical Incident Management and Secondary Traumatic Stress Policy

When a case-related or other work-related critical incident occurs for any employee of Children Services, it may lead to traumatic stress which the employee and management need to address.

Critical Incident Management

A critical incident can be defined as an emotionally stressful event or traumatic change in a person's life. Critical incidents are typically sudden, powerful events which are outside the range of ordinary experiences and which have sufficient impact to overwhelm the usually effective coping skills of either an individual or a group. These incidents may lead to intense stress which warrants intervention.

Examples of critical incidents are:

- 1) death of a child
- 2) severe injury to a child
- 3) death of a fellow worker
- 4) serious injury to a fellow worker
- 5) suicide involving a fellow worker
- 6) multiple casualty incident

- 7) any case with excessive media interest
- 8) contact with dead, severely sick or newly injured children
- 9) being personally threatened by a very violent person
- 10) being exposed to a robbery or any violent crime involving a weapon
- 11) significant event involving children
- 12) any incident beyond the range of usual human experience

When a case-related or work-related trauma occurs for any employee of Children Services, the agency will provide the affected employee(s) with assistance in addressing issues caused by the trauma to mitigate the impact of the critical incident. The first step in this process is education about managing a critical incident and resources regarding self-care against traumatic stress during this time.

Training

The agency is committed to advocating for employee awareness and education about critical incidents and traumatic stress and how these factors impact their life. All employees are required to participate in critical incident and secondary traumatic stress training.

Mandatory Critical Incident and Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) Training

Secondary Traumatic Stress or STS is physical and emotional stress responses to working with a highly traumatized population or experiencing traumatic critical incidents. STS can affect all aspects of one's life: cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and physical. In order to educate employees on managing this stress, employees will be mandated to take 3 hours of Secondary Traumatic Stress Training. Two tracks will be available. One track designed for Child Welfare Caseworkers and Support Staff and another track for Supervisors, Administrators and other Management positions. Child Welfare Caseworkers and Support Staff who are promoted to management positions will not be required to take the STS Training Management Track provided they have taken the worker track prior to promotion. Newly hired managers and managers who have not already taken a Secondary Traumatic Stress Training must take the Secondary Traumatic Stress Training Management Track within one year of hire or promotion into their new position.

The objectives for STS Training are:

- 1) Define secondary trauma and how to recognize it's symptoms;
- 2) Normalize the response – experiencing symptoms of STS is a normal response to abnormal/traumatic events;
- 3) Break down stigmas;
- 4) Identify treatment and self-care methods;
- 5) Advocate that seeking treatment does not reflect negatively on an employee's performance;
- 6) Teach Supervisors how to identify STS among their staff and how to assist employees in linking with treatment and other supportive services (i.e. EAP);
- 7) Identify agency and community resources for support.

Resources for Responding to a Critical Incident and Managing Traumatic Stress:

Critical Incident Stress Debriefing

Critical Incident Stress Debriefing is a form group crisis intervention to discuss the impact of the trauma or critical incident.

The objectives of critical incident stress debriefing are to:

- 1) provide education about stress, stress reactions and survival techniques;
- 2) provide emotional ventilation;
- 3) reassure that stress responses are controllable and that recovery is likely;
- 4) forewarn staff about signs and symptoms which might manifest in the near future;
- 5) reduce the feeling that one has been singled out to be a victim;
- 6) reduce the feeling of abnormality;
- 7) establish positive contact with mental health professionals and peer counselors;
- 8) prevent post traumatic stress disorder; and
- 9) screen and refer for additional services which may be needed.

Procedure

- 1) Scheduling a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing
 - a) When a trauma or critical incident has occurred, the employee's immediate supervisor and the next level of management review the incident with the employee.

- b) For critical incidents or traumatic events which may not be known to the supervisor, the employee shall report such incidents to his/her supervisor.
- c) Supervisor will consult with the department or regional director to determine whether the incident warrants a critical incident stress debriefing.
- d) The department or regional director contacts Human Resources to arrange the critical incident stress debriefing.
- e) Any time absent from work to attend critical incident stress debriefing sessions will be coded as regular work time.
- f) Attendance at such sessions are voluntary, will be kept confidential and will not be noted in the employee's personnel file.
- g) Any employee may contact the Employee Assistance Program for an individual consult or arrange for a personal counselor at anytime.
- h) Any supervisor/manager may contact EAP at anytime for an individual consult to acquire information on how to engage a staff member who may be experiencing secondary traumatic stress.

Employee Assistance Program or EAP Services

EAP services are available to all employees through United Behavioral Health.

Employees can access EAP services at anytime they believe these services may be needed. EAP can provide employees with solution focused phone consultations or assist the employee in locating a counselor to see in person, if necessary. Information provided to EAP is kept confidential and is not shared with the agency. EAP can also provide consultations to supervisors who may be trying to manage a critical incident or staff dealing with traumatic stress.

Peer Support Network (PSN)

Peer Supports will act as a guide and a support to staff experiencing a critical incident or traumatic stress. Directors for each region and department will approve individuals from their area to act as Peer Supports (PS) to serve in the Peer Support Network. At least one supervisor and one child welfare caseworker will be selected from direct service areas and one supervisor or child welfare caseworker/support staff will be selected from support services. Peer Supports will be provided additional training on their roles and

responsibilities. Peer Supports will also serve as members on the permanent sub-committee or the SWE Committee.