Addressing Burnout and Building Resilience for APS Line Staff

Instructor Led Training

TRAINER MANUAL

Academy for Professional Excellence

APSWI
Adult Protective Services Workforce Innovations

The Academy for Professional Excellence is a project of the San Diego State University School of Social Work

Funding Sources

This training was developed by the Academy for Professional Excellence's Adult Protective Services Workforce Innovations program, with funding from the California Department of Social Services, Adult Programs Division.

Kara Barnes, LMHC, M.A., 2026

Additional expertise provided by Jae Mohr, Workforce Development Specialist

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Introduction

We are pleased to welcome you to **Addressing Burnout and Building Resilience for APS Line Staff, Trainer Manual** developed by Adult Protective Services Workforce Innovations (APSWI), a program of the Academy for Professional Excellence under a grant from the California Department of Social Services, Adult Programs Division.

The Academy for Professional Excellence, a project of San Diego State University School of Social Work, was established in 1996 with the goal of revolutionizing the way people work to ensure the world is a healthier place. Our services integrate culturally responsive and recovery-oriented practices into our daily work to promote healing and healthy relationships. Providing around 70,000 learning experiences to health and human service professionals annually, the Academy provides a variety of workforce development solutions in Southern California and beyond. With five programs, three divisions and over 100 staff, the Academy's mission is to provide exceptional learning and development experiences for the transformation of individuals, organizations and communities.

APSWI is a program of the Academy for Professional Excellence. APSWI is designed to provide competency-based, multidisciplinary training to Adult Protective Services professionals and their partners. APSWI's overarching goal is the professionalization of Adult Protective Services professionals to ensure that abused and vulnerable older adults and adults with disabilities receive high quality, effective interventions and services.

APSWI partners with state and national organizations and experts in the older adult and adults with disabilities professions to empower APS professionals and those they serve to live safely, peacefully and in a world that is free from abuse and neglect.

APSWI's partners include:

- National Adult Protective Services Association (NAPSA) and the National Adult Protective Services Training Center (NATC)
- California Department of Social Services (CDSS), Adult Programs Division
- County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA), Protective Services Operations Committee (PSOC)
- California's Curriculum Advisory Committee (CAC) Committee

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Acknowledgements

This training is the result of a collaborative effort between Adult Protective Services (APS) administrators, supervisors, staff development officers and line staff across the state and the nation; professional educators; and the Academy for Professional Excellence staff members. APSWI would like to thank the following individuals and agencies:

Agencies

California Department of Social Services Adult Services Division

National Adult Protective Services Association

Committees:

California's Curriculum Advisory Committee with input from the following members:

- Marisa Hunt, Social Services Supervisor I, Orange County
- Nashay Browning, APS Supervisor, San Diego County
- Quatana Hodges, Senior Social Services Supervisor, Orange County

Southern California's Training Planning Committee

National Adult Protective Services Association (NAPSA) Education & Development Committee

Curriculum Developer

Kara Barnes, LMHC, M.A.

Additional Expertise

Jae Mohr, Workforce Development Specialist

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How to Use This Manual

This curriculum was developed as a virtual **4 hour workshop, including built in breaks,** using the Zoom platform, paying close attention to virtual training best practices. It can be tailored to a different virtual platform (WebEx, GoTo Training, etc.), if necessary. It may also be trained in-person by modifying activity and engagement prompts as necessary. When possible, virtual and in-person prompts are given.

The Participant Manual should be sent ahead of time as a fillable PDF if using Adobe Acrobat or to allow participants to print a hard copy.

- Actions which the trainer takes during the training are written in **bold**
- *Trainer Notes are italicized*

Use of language: Throughout the manual, APS professional is used to denote individual staff who may go by various titles. The term client is used most often to describe the individual at the center of the APS investigation. However, if concept or material was directly quoted from copyrighted material, another term may be used.

He and she have been replaced with the gender-neutral they throughout this manual, unless quoted from copyrighted material. This should not be thought of as plural persons, but rather a gender-neutral term describing all humans.

Customizing the Power Point:

- This manual is set up so that the trainer script/content material is on the same page as the accompanying PowerPoint slide.
- To hide a slide in PowerPoint, on the Slides tab in normal view, select the slide you want to hide.
- On the Slide Show menu, click Hide Slide. The slide number will have a line through it to show you have hidden it.
- The slide remains in your file even though it is hidden when you rune the presentation.

Course Outline:

The course outline, provided in the next section of this manual, is the class schedule used for development of this curriculum. It can be used to help determine how much time is needed to present each section. However, times will vary based on the experience and engagement of the audience.

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Trainer Guidelines

It is recommended that someone with a strong background in Behavioral Health facilitate this virtual workshop. Co-facilitation with an APS trainer or supervisor is encouraged.

This training is unique because it breaks down concepts that are potentially vulnerable or activating. It is normal for a group to present as guarded because of the nature of this content.

- This is a normal part of the process of healthy group development.
- With sensitive topics like mental health or personal wellbeing, there needs to be ample psychological safety in order to facilitate meaningful discussion.
- Psychological safety means people can speak honestly without fear of a punishment or humiliation. (Edmondson & Mortensen, 2021)

Consider the dynamics of the group you are working with that might impact the psychological safety of the group.

1. Does this group mix supervisors with their team? This creates a power imbalance and could impact the perceived safety of the group to share on a sensitive topic.
2. Do the attendees of this training know each other already? This could either aid or hinder the sense of group safety. A group that knows each other already could already feel comfortable sharing on sensitive topics *or* they could be hesitant to share vulnerable information with people they see every day.
3. Are there any persons that serve in a leadership role that make hiring or policy decisions such as administrators or HR managers? This would undoubtably contribute to a sense of lacking psychological safety, in which case the discussion questions and groups need to be tailored to a group that is not going to share personal details.

Consider these helpful tips in navigating a more guarded group:

1. *Do not* force discussion by saying things like, "we can sit in silence as long as we need to" or calling specific people out to share.
2. *Do* use a variety of inviting techniques as appropriate.
    a. Share first and model the level of vulnerability that is appropriate for the discussion.

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   b. Encourage people to put their answers in the chat and then ask a person or the group at large if they are willing to come off mute to "share more", letting them know that it is not required.
   c. Instead of big group discussions, put people in small breakout rooms, separating the leadership from the staff if possible.
   d. Instead of asking the question directly, "When have you felt…" create an "other" effect by saying, "When might someone feel…".
   e. Create a scenario and talk about how that person might have felt or responded
3. Whenever possible, get to know the dynamics and power differentials of the attendees before the training so you can cater your engagement activities appropriately.

Suggestions for virtual training when possible:

- Have a moderator or co-host who can primarily focus on the virtual aspects of this training (e.g., monitoring chat box, launching polls, assigning breakout groups, monitoring participant reactions, etc.).
- Test out the use of the breakout room feature prior to conducting this training.
- Log in at least 30 minutes prior to the training to ensure the virtual classroom is fully functioning and that you are comfortable navigating it.
- Your equipment and platform may dictate how you do some activities or discussion. There are times you may not be able to see everyone's faces, names or reactions (thumbs up, mute/unmute, etc.). There is a need for both verbal discussion and chat discussion. At such times, the moderator will fill a critical role monitoring those features you cannot. Practice during a run through how you will use the various functions for each section.
- The optimal size for this virtual training is 20-25 participants.

The following **teaching strategies** are incorporated:

- Lecture segments
- Interactive exercises (e.g., breakout groups, chat box discussion, video demonstration, polling activities)
- Question/answer periods
- PowerPoint Slides

The following **equipment and materials** are needed:

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- Trainer Manual
- Participant Manual
- PowerPoint Slides
- Headset with microphone Computer

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Virtual Training Tips

Training and facilitation have always been an art. Virtual training is no exception. Below are some helpful tips to remember and implement when training in a virtual environment.

- Assume nothing.
  - Do not assume everyone has the same knowledge or comfort level with technology or has access to equipment like printers, video camera, headsets or even reliable Wi-Fi.
- Distractions are everywhere.
  - Participants have greater access to distractions (email, phone, others at home) which can take their focus away from the training. Therefore, explain everything and summarize before asking participants to complete an activity and check for clarification.
- Over explain when possible.
  - The virtual room doesn't allow for participants to see everything you're doing as they can in-person. Share as you navigate the virtual environment. If you are silent while looking for something or finding a screen, they may think something is frozen.
- Mute with purpose.
  - "Mute all" function can help ensure we don't hear conversations we're not supposed to. However, it can also send a message to the participants that they are a passive participant and may not make them feel comfortable taking themselves off mute when you want them to speak.
- Two screens can be a lifesaver.
  - This allows you to move your chat box or participant gallery view away from your presentation so you can see more of what's going on.
- Rely on practice, not luck.
  - Winging it during an in-person training or facilitation may work from time to time, but doesn't work in the virtual environment. In addition to covering the content, you have to manage all of the technology issues, learning styles in a virtual room, and it will show if you're not prepared.
- Bring the energy.
  - As trainers, we are no strangers to being "on," standing and moving around. However, some of the body language, subtle nonverbal skills we relied on the in-person training room do not translate well in the

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virtual environment. While this may make you more tired, it's important to up your enthusiasm, voice, and presence in order to engage with attendees.

- Be mindful of your space.
  - Training virtually brings an entirely new component of what we're willing to share with others. Learners can get distracted with what's in your background, whether what is physically there or if you set your video to use a virtual background.
  - It's important to reflect on questions of privilege, diversity and equity when thinking of your training space.

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Executive Summary

In a time where helping professionals are often asked to "do more with less", it is no surprise that organizations are witnessing a shift in the engagement and wellbeing of their staff. This course examines the unique stressors placed on helping professionals, specifically Adult Protective Service employees. It clarifies the definition of burnout and distinguishes that experience from other workplace stressors including secondary traumatic stress, empathic distress (also termed as compassion fatigue), and moral distress. This course, designed for line staff, provides specific practices for increasing the wellbeing and resilience of APS professionals.

Instructor Led Training

This course is an Instructor Led Training, designed to be facilitated virtually. The curriculum and activities can be adapted to an in-person environment with the appropriate materials.

Course Requirements

N/A

Intended Audience

This training is intended for Adult Protective Services line staff. Because of the power dynamics that occur between direct reports and leadership, it's encouraged to focus the attendance with line staff.

Learning Objectives:

Upon completion of this training, participants will be able to:

- Summarize the differences between the various sources of workplace stress including how they are caused and how they might present
- Describe the sources of burnout on an organizational level
- Recognize the symptoms of workplace stress on an individual level
- Identify a variety of interventions to increase personal resilience

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Course Outline

CONTENT	MATERIALS	TIME
Welcome, Introductions and Course Overview		**Total: 15 minutes**
Land Acknowledgement		
Course Overview and Learning Objectives		
Tour of Workplace Stress		**Total: 55**
Burnout and Warning Signs Activity: My Experience of Burnout (*Individual Poll)*		2 minutes
Secondary Traumatic Stress Activity: My Experience of STS (*Individual Poll)*		5 minutes
Empathetic Distress (Compassion Fatigue) Activity: Compassion vs Empathy (*Individual, Large Group Reflection)*	Polling options	5 minutes
Activity: Experiential Breaks (*Individual*)	Do Nothing for Two Minutes Website	15 minutes
Burnout		**Total: 75**
Activity: Burnout Sorting (*Large Group Discussion)*	Polling options	5-10 minutes
Worker Profiles		
Activity: Personal Burnout Reflection (*Small and Large Group Discussion*)		10 minutes

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CONTENT	MATERIALS	TIME
Individual and Organizational Responsibilities		
Concern, Influence and Control		
Activity: Circle Sorting (*Large Group Discussion)*		5-7 minutes
10-Minute Break w/ Discussion		12 minutes
Building Resilience		**Total: 70**
Self-Awareness Activity: My Why (*Individual Reflection and Group Discussion*)	Polling options	3-5 minutes
Contributing Factors Activity: STS Contributing Factors (*Individual Reflection)*		5-7 minutes
Warning Signs Activity: Personal Warning Signs (*Individual Reflection)*		3 minutes
Intentional Engagement		
Edges of Stress Events		
Approaches: • Window • Recovery • Green Cross Ethical Guidelines • Balance Map Activity: The Balance Map (*Individual Reflection)*		5 minutes

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CONTENT	MATERIALS	TIME
Closing, Review, and Evaluation		**Total: 20 minutes**
Activity: P-I-E		5-7 minutes
TOTAL (Including Breaks)		**Total: 4 hours**

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Welcome, Introductions and Course Overview

Time Allotted: 15 minutes

Associated Objective(s): N/A

Method: Instruction

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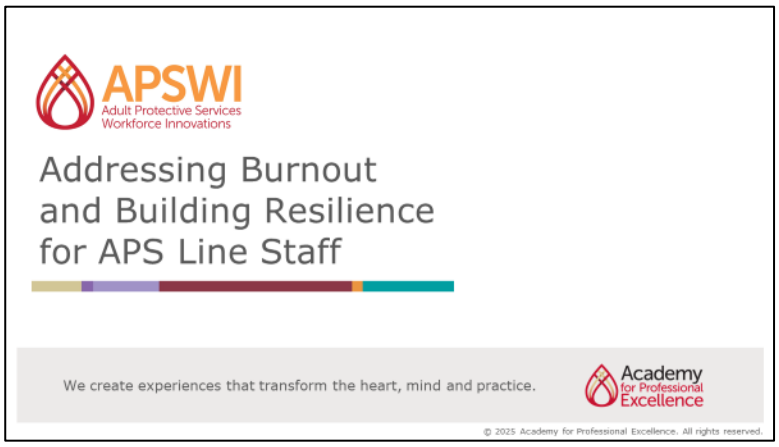
Slide #1: Addressing Burnout and Building Resilience for APS Line Staff



Welcome learners and allow everyone to settle in.

Ask learners to sign in or type names, titles, and counties into chat box.

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Slide #2: About the Academy and APSWI

Explain that the Academy for Professional Excellence is a project of San Diego State School of Social Work. Its mission is to provide exceptional workforce development and learning experiences for the transformation of individuals, organizations, and communities.

Explain that Adult Protective Services Workforce Innovations (APSWI) provides innovative workforce development to APS professionals and their partners. APSWI is a program of the Academy for Professional Excellence along with others listed on the slide.

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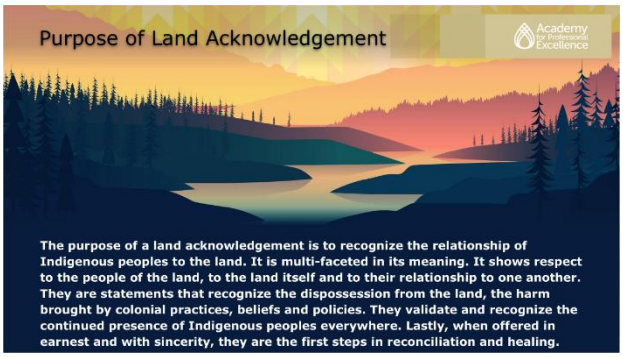
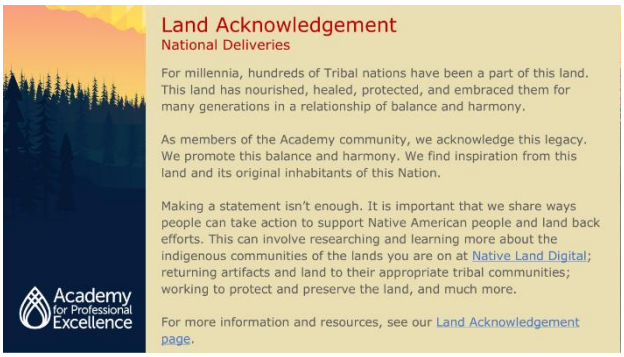
Slide #3 & 4: Land Acknowledgment





Trainer Note: These slides incorporate a national land acknowledgment to honor the land that anyone who accesses the materials is on. When training, insert the land you're training from.

Share:

- Slide #3- The purpose of a land acknowledgement is to recognize the relationship of Indigenous peoples to the land. It is multi-faceted in its meaning. It shows respect to the people of the land, to the land itself and to their relationship to one another. They are statements that recognize the dispossession from the land, the harm brought by colonial practices, beliefs and policies. They validate and recognize the continued presence of Indigenous peoples everywhere. Lastly, when offered in earnest and with sincerity, they are the first steps in reconciliation and healing.

- Slide #4- For millennia, hundreds of Tribal nations have been a part of this land. This land has nourished, healed, protected, and embraced them for many generations in a relationship of balance and harmony. As members of the Academy community, we acknowledge this legacy. We promote this balance and harmony. We find inspiration from this land; the land of the original inhabitants of this Nation. Find the tribe(s) in your area: Native Land Digital

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Slide #5: Housekeeping & Introductions

Review housekeeping items of important reminders and information for the day.

- Set cell phones to silent/vibrate
- Schedule - Please return promptly from breaks and help us keep to the schedule
- Comfort breaks:
    - Take restroom breaks when needed
    - Please feel free to walk about or stretch throughout the day as needed
    - Location of restrooms (if in person)
- Materials
    - PowerPoint Slides
    - Participant Materials
- Introductions

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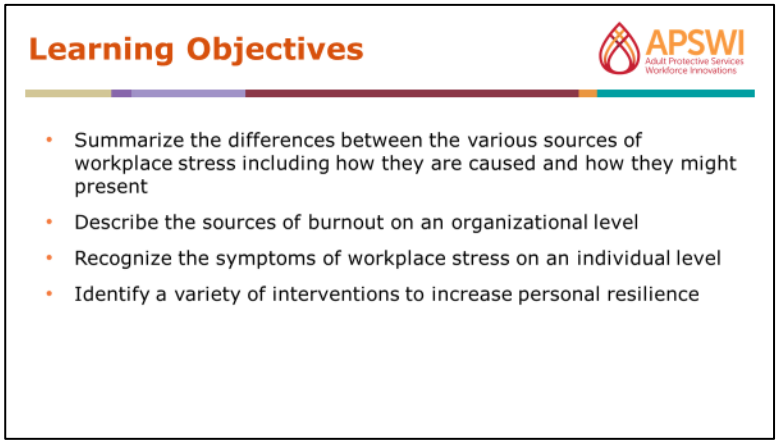
Slide #6: Learning Objectives



Review the following:

Upon completion of the training, learners will be able to:

- Summarize the differences between the various sources of workplace stress including how they are caused and how they might present
- Describe the sources of burnout on an organizational level
- Recognize the symptoms of workplace stress on an individual level
- Identify a variety of interventions to increase personal resilience

Explain that this training is unique when compared with trainings they've received in the past:

- Instead of focusing on professional development, this training is focused on the learners personally; on their wellbeing at a personal level and on supporting their staff with their wellbeing.
- Learners might find themselves hesitant or uncomfortable to reflect on this topic during work hours or in a group of fellow professionals.

Reassure that this training will encourage participation by choice:

- Learners are in control of how much they share in the group setting. They will not be pressured by the trainer to share information that conflicts with their boundaries.
- Learners are encouraged to engage in the personal reflection activities with intention.
- Learners will never be asked to share with the group the things they reflect on personally.

Encourage participants to take advantage of this unique chance to focus on themselves while in the workplace.

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Tour of Workplace Stress

Time Allotted: 55 minutes

Associated Objective(s): Summarize the differences between the various sources of workplace stress including how they are caused and how they might present

Method: Instruction, Polls, Personal Reflection

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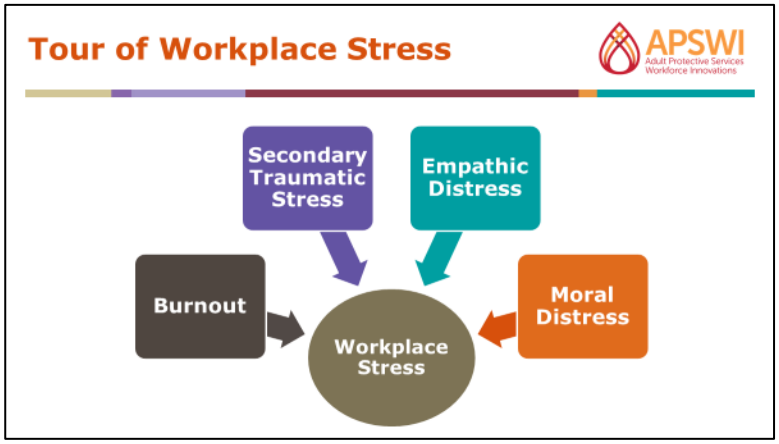
Slide #7: Tour of Workplace Stress



Trainer Note: This slide has animation.

Share that the term "burned out" is a common way to describe feeling stressed at work. The term burnout was coined in 1981 by Christina Maslach and has been used since to describe the impact of *any* type of stress in the workplace (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Likely because it provides a powerful descriptive image that accurately describes how employees emotionally and physically feel when they experience stress at work.

Explain that not every experience of stress in the workplace is burnout. There are a variety of reasons someone might feel stressed at work.

Trainer Note: Click slide to reveal the remaining words; secondary traumatic stress, empathic distress and moral distress.

Explain that in the helping profession, employees are exposed to unique emotional challenges that could also cause them to experience other forms of workplace stress like:

- secondary traumatic stress
- empathic distress (another term for "compassion fatigue")
- moral distress

Explain that understanding different sources of workplace stress will help the learners understand why they might be experiencing a variety of symptoms connected with their stress at work.

Inform learners that this first section of this training will be dedicated to providing a brief overview of the different definitions, causes, and warning signs of each of these terms.

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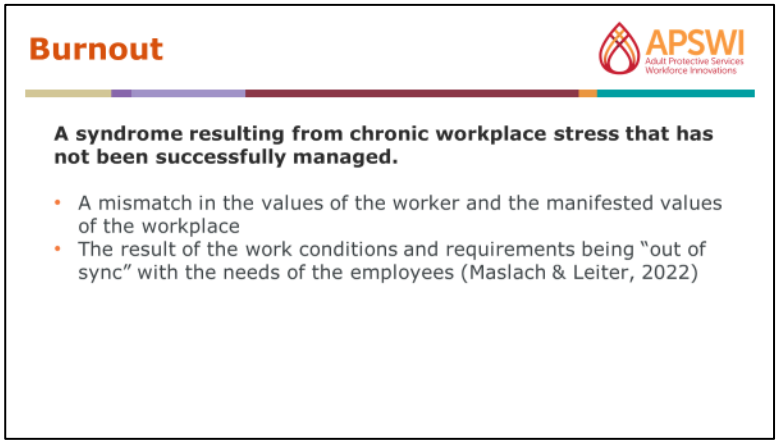
Slide #8: Burnout



Trainer Note: The "values" mentioned here will be described in greater detail in the next section. You may choose to add clarity here with an example connected to workload, control, fairness, community, or rewards.

Explain that burnout is a result of chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is caused by a mismatch between the values of the employee in their work and the manifested values of the organization.

Clarify that the values of the workplace are not just the mission statements or words hanging in the halls of the offices. The values of an organization are manifested through

- policies
- practices
- models of leadership in management teams

Explain that burnout is the direct result of the working conditions and requirements being out of sync with the needs and values of the employees. (Maslach & Leiter, 2022)

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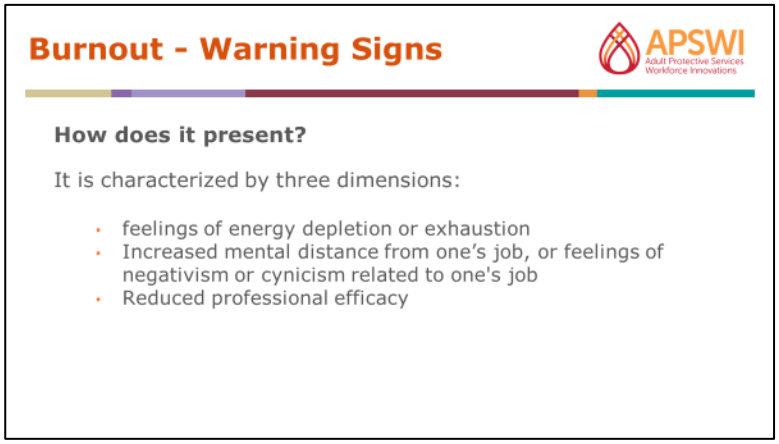
Slide #9: Burnout - Warning Signs



Trainer Note: Optional contextual information about the term "burnout": In 2019, the definition of burnout was included in the 11th revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) published by the World Health Organization (World Health Organization [WHO], 2019). This definition cites research done primarily by University of California-Berkeley researcher, Christina Maslach.

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) defines burnout with three dimensions of burnout symptoms:

- feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion
- increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job
- reduced professional efficacy

Clarify that *reduced professional efficacy* relates to one's own sense of effectiveness in their job. Those who are burned out either feel that they don't know how to do their job well or are incapable of performing required job tasks.

Activity: My Experience of Burnout (2 minutes)
Anonymous Poll

Trainer Note: This activity is meant to engage the learners quickly, but it is optional based on time. In order to move quickly, it is recommended that you have your polls prepared ahead of time, with settings set to allow for anonymous multiple answer choices.

Think about a job where you experienced burnout, which of the following dimensions of burnout most closely relates to that experience? Select all that apply:

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1. Energy depletion and/or exhaustion
2. Feeling distant, negative or cynical about your job
3. Feeling that you are ineffective in your job
4. None, I've never felt burned out in a job

Trainer Note: when launching the poll, remember to inform the learners that their answers will be anonymous so that they can feel safe to be honest in their self-reflection and self-disclosure.

Review the trends from the poll and make any notable observations related to this group's experience of burnout.

Emphasize that burnout can be experienced by anyone in any profession, and that the learners might have been thinking about a job unrelated to APS when they answered the poll question.

Explain that while burnout can be experienced by any working professional, there are experiences of workplace stress that are unique to helping professions, like APS.

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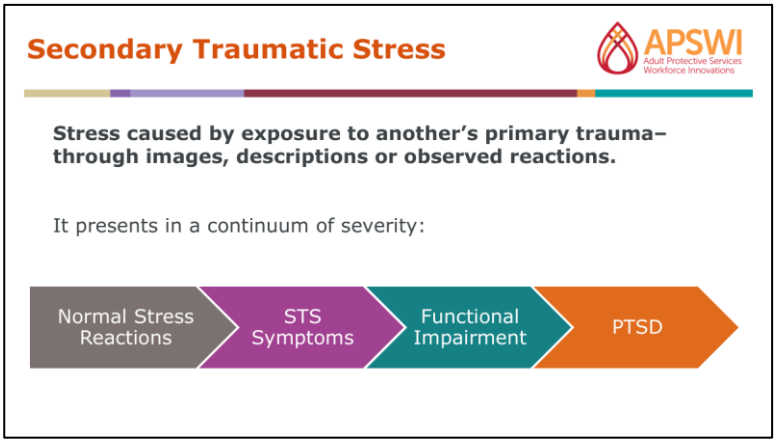
Slide #10: Secondary Traumatic Stress



Explain that secondary traumatic stress (STS) is a stress reaction caused by exposure to the primary trauma of another individual through images, descriptions or observed reactions (Bride et al., 2024).

Define *primary trauma* as personally experiencing or witnessing a dangerous event or situation. *Secondary trauma* is hearing about or seeing evidence of a dangerous event or situation that happened to another person (Mathieu, 2012).

Emphasize the following key points about STS:

- STS is a workplace stressor unique to helping professions, like APS, that support individuals who have experienced primary trauma.
- Secondary trauma exposure is an inevitable experience in APS work because the nature of the job is to gather evidence of and describe in detail the trauma events of older adults and adults with disabilities who have been harmed.
- The impact of secondary trauma presents on a continuum of severity.

Define the following elements of the STS continuum with examples:

- *Normal stress reactions* to secondary trauma are any adverse reactions that subside in a reasonable amount of time with distraction or distance from the trauma.
    - Example: An APS professional feels disturbed by the physical evidence of abuse on a client that lives alone. After the visit, the feeling of distress dissipates over time. The APS professional would likely feel distressed each time they come in contact with that evidence until the case is closed or client is protected from harm.

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- *STS symptoms* include a global change in perception regarding one's personal safety or the safety of the community. It is common for helping professionals to say that their worldview fundamentally changed because of their career.
    - Example: After seeing the evidence of physical abuse of a client, the APS professional becomes nervous about the safety of their family member who is an older adult and lives alone. They start to think or feel that living alone and aging are not safe. The APS professional starts to notice that they are more agitated and easily activated at work. The quality of their sleep is impacted and they notice that they are feeling more fatigued
- *Functional impairment* means that this altered sense of safety is disrupting relationships, occupation, or health. (Bride, 2025)
    - Example: The investigator's lack of sleep is beginning to cause brain fog at work and is contributing to an overall sense of fatigue that is making it hard to engage in their social relationships. Their agitation is interfering with their ability to connect with their coworkers and is causing isolation in the workplace. Their sense of enjoyment at work has gone down significantly and they are calling out of work more often. Their stress about their family member's safety is causing them to be in conflict with other members of their family.
- The most severe presentation of secondary traumatic stress is meeting the diagnostic criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which presents with intrusive thoughts or memories coupled with alterations in mood and arousal. **Explain** that the term "arousal" is a clinical term that refers to an activated nervous system, often noticed by elevated heart rate, agitation, and/or rapid breathing. Oftentimes the only group of individuals who seek professional help are those who meet criteria for PTSD, but those who experience functional impairment would also benefit from seeking professional support.
    - Example: The investigator is having intrusive thoughts of their family member being harmed in their home. They avoid working on the physical abuse case because of the images of the physical abuse causing extreme distress. They become hypervigilant and easily agitated in their daily interactions and have a consistent low mood.(Bride et al., 2024)

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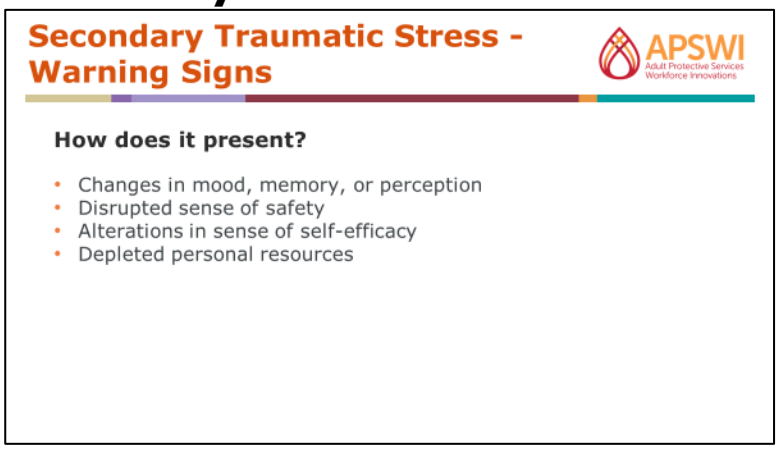
Slide #11: Secondary Traumatic Stress - Warning Signs



Provide the following as warning signs of secondary traumatic stress:

- alterations in mood, memory or perception, **clarify** that the alteration is often connected to a sense that the world or community is no longer safe
- feeling hopeless or ineffective
- difficulty coping due to a sense of depleted personal resources

Explain that these personal resources could refer to effective coping mechanisms, energy, motivation, desire, focus, or anything that an individual draws on to help them get through challenges or adversity.

Activity: My Experience of Secondary Traumatic Stress (4-5 minutes)
Anonymous Poll

Trainer Note: Prepare the following poll question ahead of time, ensuring that multiple answers are allowed and that answers are anonymous.

Introduce the activity by emphasizing the following points:

- STS is a universal experience at APS, everyone has experienced it in some form because of the population of the clients you serve.
- Participation in this activity is optional, learners should be aware of their own limits and should opt out of this activity if it is too activating.
- Responses to this poll are anonymous for the purpose of maintaining the psychological safety of the learners.
- Learners are encouraged to be honest in their self-reflection and self-disclosure.
- Honest participation in this exercise could benefit other learners who might feel isolated in their experience at APS.

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Prompt learners to think about your own experience of STS and mark all statements that apply to you.

1. I have had normal stress reactions that went away with time and distance from the case.
2. I've started to change how I view the world. Certain locations or situations that once felt neutral have begun to feel dangerous to me.
3. My stress responses and/or lack of feeling safe have affected my health, social life, or work life.
4. I might have or definitely have met criteria for PTSD, (intrusive thoughts or memories, activated nervous system, notable changes in mood)

Allow one to two minutes of time for participation, **review** the trends from the poll and make any notable observations related to the group's experience of STS.

Emphasize that STS is an experience unique to helping professionals, and is considered an "occupational hazard" of working with the public.

Thank learners for their honest participation and **emphasize** that addressing STS in the workplace is an important step towards creating a healthier workplace

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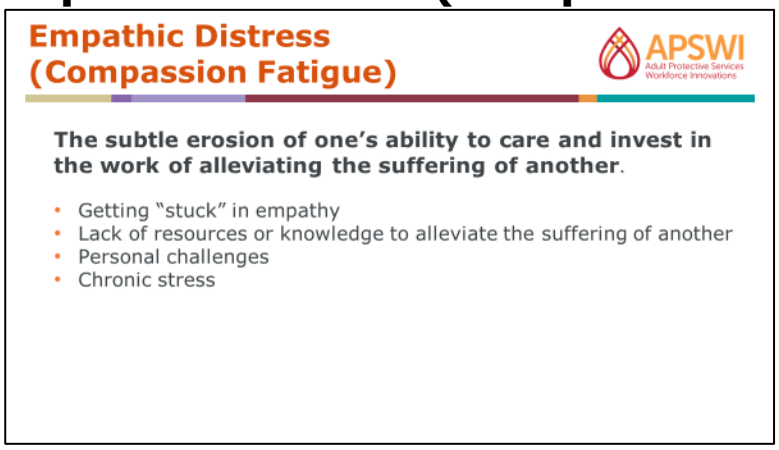
Slide #12: Empathic Distress (Compassion Fatigue)



Trainer Note: Think of some examples like a friend in an unhealthy relationship, or a loved one with a chronic substance misuse challenge.

Clarify that empathic distress is a new term for compassion fatigue.

Define *empathic distress* as the subtle erosion of one's ability to care and invest in the work of alleviating the suffering of another (Mathieu, 2012).

Ask learners to think of a time when they were first invested in someone, but as time went on, the person or situation absorbed their time and energy beyond what they were willing to give.

Invite learners to think how their personal investment, energy levels and motivation to provide support changed over time. This is a model for the experience of empathic distress.

Explain that the name change from compassion fatigue to empathic distress is a significant change because it addresses what has been displayed through decades of research on compassion:

- *compassion does not fatigue*
- compassion is a re-energizing antidote to the experience of empathic distress

Emphasize that the term *empathic distress* describes that this particular source of stress is often caused by getting stuck in the experience of empathy, meaning that an individual is so empathically connected to another person that they begin to take on the emotional experiences of the person in distress.

Share that our bodies are wired for empathy. Empathy is an important element of connecting as humans.

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Explain that there is a vital distinction between having empathy and getting absorbed in the empathic experience which can lead to the formation of anxiety or depressive disorders.

Activity: Compassion vs Empathy (2-5 minutes)

Self-reflection, Mentimeter (optional)

Trainer Note: (Optional, if time allows) Ask the learners to put a single word or phrase that describes how it feels to be with this person into the Mentimeter.

Explain that we have an intuitive understanding of compassion versus empathy in our own personal relationships.

Invite learners to reflect on someone in their personal life that fits the description below:

- (The compassionate other) There are people that we are drawn to when we are suffering because they are both caring and stable. They know how to listen empathetically and they offer an appropriate response that alleviates our suffering. These compassionate people seem to know when it is right to offer suggestions versus just listening. They instill both confidence and understanding in us. We feel better after we spend time with them.

In contrast, **invite** learners to reflect on someone in their personal life that fits this description below:

- (The empathically distressed other) There are people that we avoid talking to when we are suffering because their deep empathy for us causes them to suffer with us. We see that our pain adds to their pain and we might feel that we are a burden to them. We might witness them become dysregulated when we express our emotions to them. We often feel worse after we spend time with them. These people care deeply and are driven by altruistic motives; however, they take on the pain of another as if it is their own and can become consumed by their own experience of the pain, thus unintentionally isolating themselves from the person in distress.

Explain that there are a variety of reasons why an individual slowly loses their ability to care for those in distress, including:

- lack of knowledge or training
- lack of resources
- personal challenges
- chronic stress

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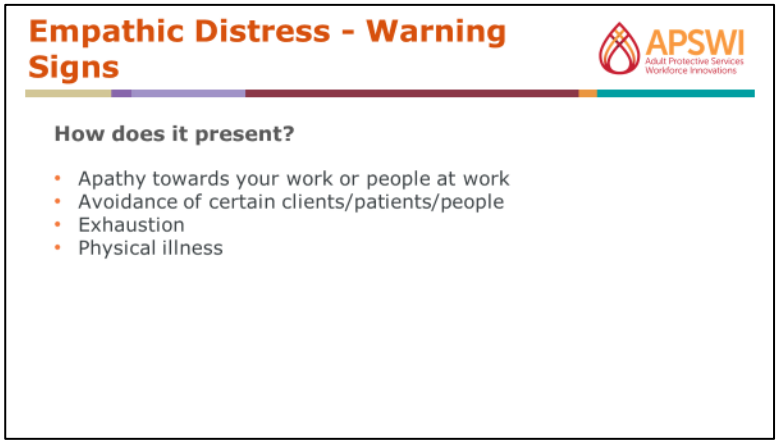
Slide #13: Empathic Distress - Warning Signs



Explain that empathic distress often manifests through:

- apathy (a lack of interest or enthusiasm) towards one's work or the people they serve in their work
- avoidance of certain people
- feeling exhausted
- getting physically sick more often

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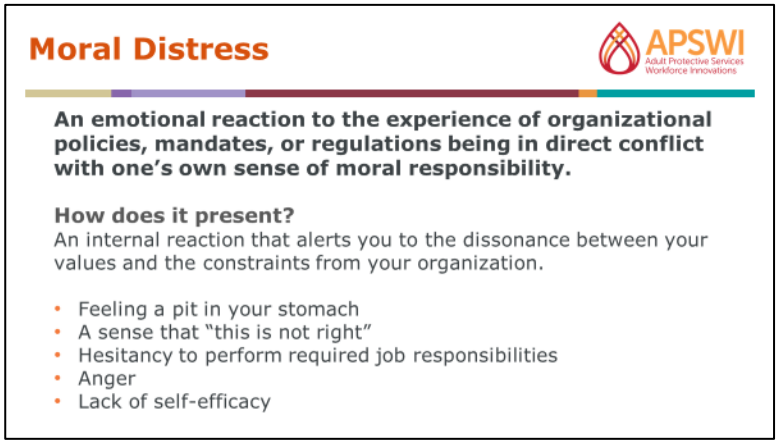
Slide #14: Moral Distress



Describe moral distress as an emotional reaction to the experience of organizational policies, mandates, or regulations being in direct conflict with one's own sense of moral responsibility.

Trainer Note: To emphasize this concept, you might invite learners to think about a time when they were faced with a situation that required them to act in a certain way that was contrary to their own morals or values system. Encourage them to reflect on the feelings that emerged because of this dilemma.

Explain that moral distress is often described as feeling a pit in your stomach or a sense that "this is not right". One might experience:

- a feeling of hesitancy to follow through with the mandated action
- anger at policies or leadership
- uncertainty about know how to do their job effectively (Mathieu, 2026)

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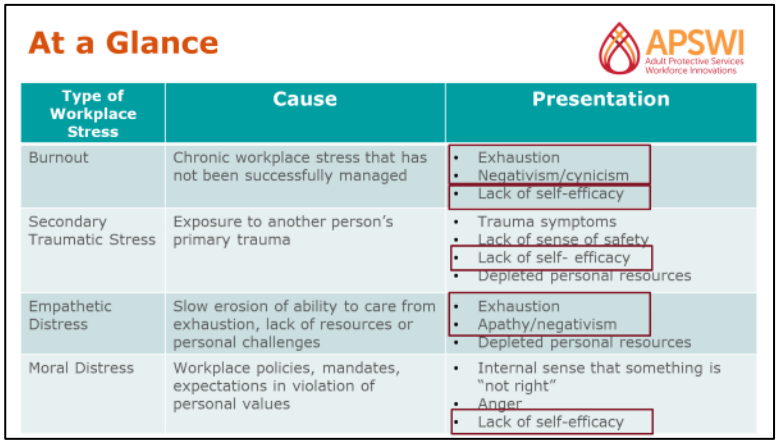
Slide #15: At a Glance



Type of Workplace Stress	Cause	Presentation
Burnout	Chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed	• Exhaustion • Negativism/cynicism • Lack of self-efficacy
Secondary Traumatic Stress	Exposure to another person's primary trauma	• Trauma symptoms • Lack of sense of safety • Lack of self- efficacy • Depleted personal resources
Empathetic Distress	Slow erosion of ability to care from exhaustion, lack of resources or personal challenges	• Exhaustion • Apathy/negativism • Depleted personal resources
Moral Distress	Workplace policies, mandates, expectations in violation of personal values	• Internal sense that something is "not right" • Anger • Lack of self-efficacy

Trainer Note: This slide has three layers of animation. The first layer is the original chart, the next layers outline similarities in the different presentations of burnout, secondary traumatic stress, empathic distress (compassion fatigue) and moral distress.

Explain that it is easy to see why burnout has been used for many years to describe a variety of workplace stresses. **Highlight** that each individual workplace stress experience that was just described shares an element of its presentation with burnout.

Click slide to show next layer.

Explain that empathic distress shares a sense of exhaustion and cynicism with burnout.

Click slide to show last layer.

Explain that secondary traumatic stress and moral distress can both exhibit a sense of lacking effectiveness or capability to perform work tasks.

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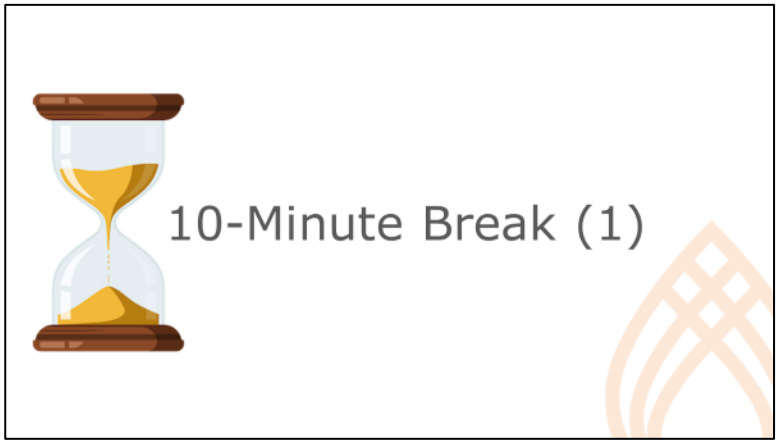
Slide #16: 10-Minute Break (1)



Trainer Note: This is an intentional break time to allow learners to participate in an experiential activity and group discussion upon their return from break. While this is an important component of the training, you can rearrange this break time and subsequent activity to take place at any time during the training. There is another 10-minute break and follow up activity later in the training, so be mindful to space these two breaks apart reasonably.

Instructions for the break:

1. **Instruct** the group to take the 10-minute break time to listen to their bodies and respond, maybe they need to stretch, eat, take a walk, etc.
2. **Encourage** the learners to take time away for rest and recovery.
3. Be sure *not* to suggest that the learners catch up on anything work-related.

Break

Instructions for the activity:

1. **Welcome** the learners back from break
2. **Launch** the following anonymous poll:

   How did you spend your break?

   a) Mostly on taking care of personal needs
   b) Equal time on my needs and work-related tasks
   c) Mostly work-related tasks, a little bit of personal care
   d) Only work, no personal care

3. **Discuss** with the group about what prevents us from taking care of ourselves at work even when the opportunity is presented?

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Activity: Do nothing for two minutes (4 minutes)
Large group activity

Instructions:

1. **Paste** the link in the chat (Do Nothing for 2 Minutes) and tell the learners that this a website they can visit at any time to give them a break.
    a. When they start the activity they cannot wiggle their mouse or click any keys or the 2-minute timer starts over.
2. The trainer will open this website up on their own computer and share screen. Make sure the sound is being shared.
3. **Invite** the learners to join them in doing nothing for 2 minutes.
4. Also **invite** the learners to notice what urges their body has towards doing something, what emotions they experience, and what thoughts run through their mind in those two minutes.

Discuss with the group at the end of the two minutes what they noticed about themselves when they did nothing. You might ask if anyone made it to the end without doing anything. For those who did not, what made it difficult?

Explain that this exercise of doing nothing can be a useful tool in discovering our barriers to prioritizing our personal wellness.

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Burnout

Time Allotted: 75 minutes

Associated Objective(s): Describe the sources of burnout on an organizational level

Method: Instruction, Group Discussion

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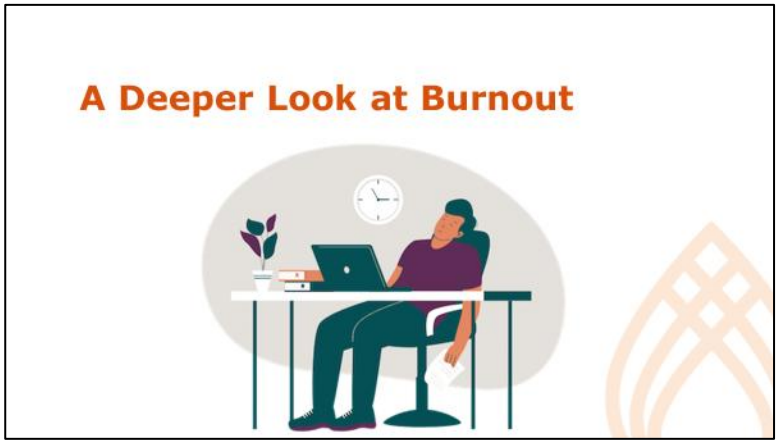
Slide #17: A Deeper Look at Burnout



Share in order to further understand burnout, let's take a deeper look at some various ways of how burnout can manifest itself. We'll take a look at a scenario and then sort specific observations into one of three different bins, exhaustion, mental distance or low self-efficacy.

Activity: Burnout Scenario Activity (5 minutes)
Large Group Virtual Chat Discussion or Mentimeter (for anonymous participation)

Trainer Note: If you opt to do the Mentimeter, set up the prompt ahead of time so it is ready for this activity.

1. **Introduce** the activity by sharing that although there are three defining symptom features of burnout (exhaustion, negativism/cynicism and lack of self-efficacy), those symptoms manifest differently in each person.
2. **Read** the following scenario:

   Imagine you are talking to your teammate, Jose and they say that another person on your team, Kelly "is getting burned out".

3. **Ask** the group to put into the chat or Mentimeter (word cloud) ideas of specific observations Jose may have made that would lead them to describe Kelly as "burned out".

Trainer Note: You might think of an example like "their teammate is frequently complaining about the job" to fuel the discussion. Give the group 30 seconds to 1 minute to place their ideas in the chat or Mentimeter (word cloud).

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Slide #18: Let's Sort!

Trainer Note: This portion of the activity is optional depending on time. Instead of sorting as a group, you may opt to verbally sort the answers yourself to emphasize the behaviors that go into each category. The important part is that the learners begin connecting the concepts of burnout with the actual experience of burnout.

Activity: Burnout Sorting Activity (5 minutes)
Large Group and Chat Discussion

Instructions: Select a variety of submissions, then one by one:

1. **Read** the submission aloud
2. **Ask** the group to decide which element of burnout it is connected to (Example: "the teammate is frequently complaining" would go under "mental distance/cynicism")
3. **Invite** the group to offer their answers aloud or put them into the chat

Explain that in order for someone to experience "true" burnout, they would need to experience symptoms from all three categories- exhaustion, mental distance, and lack of self-efficacy.

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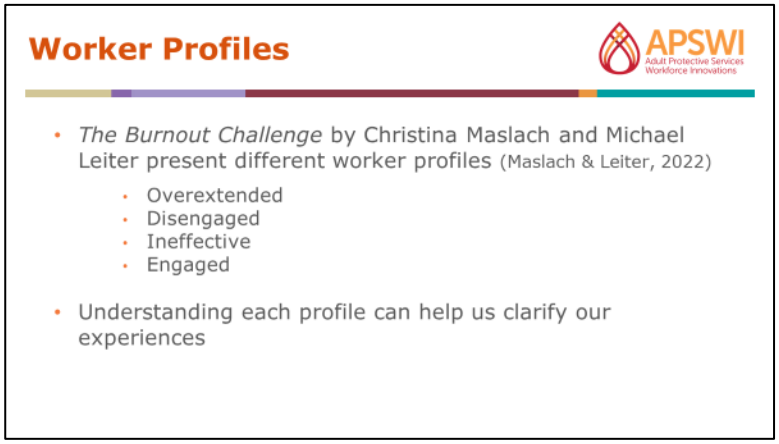
Slide #19: Worker Profiles



Share that in their book, *The Burnout Challenge*, Christina Maslach and Michael Leiter present different worker profiles that are connected to the elements of burnout, but don't meet the criteria for full burnout. Those profiles are overextended, disengaged, ineffective and engaged (Maslach & Leiter, 2022).

Highlight that understanding each worker profile can help to clarify our individual experience of workplace stress as it relates to burnout.

As the learners learn about each of the worker profiles, **invite** them to consider which profile they currently fit into regarding their experience at APS.

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Slide #20: Overextended

Explain that the overextended worker mainly shows signs of exhaustion.

They might report:

- heavy workload
- high demands at work
- working long hours

Emphasize that the overextended worker still believes in the work they do and their ability to perform their work tasks.

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Slide #21: Disengaged

Explain that the disengaged worker is consistently negative about their job and manifests a lack of motivation to do their work.

They might report:

- lack of control over how they work
- the rewards at work are insufficient
- low quality relationships at work
- the highest number of values mismatches with their place of work

Emphasize that while the disengaged worker feels they do a good job in their work and is not likely to express feeling exhausted, they present most similarly to someone in full burnout.

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Slide #22: Ineffective

Explain that the ineffective worker is likely to express a negative sense of their own accomplishments.

They might report:

- They do not see their work as intrinsically rewarding.
- They question their own ability to carry out their required work tasks.
- Loss of confidence in their ability to make a difference.

Share that the ineffective worker is more likely to have energy for the job and may even enjoy the social component of their work.

Emphasize that of all the worker profiles discussed so far, the ineffective workers report the least amount of values mismatches with their workplace.

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Slide #23: Engaged

Explain that the engaged worker is the opposite of burned out.

- They have the energy to do their job.
- They are engaged in their work.
- They feel reasonably effective and accomplished.
- They may still have complaints or challenges with their job but are able to work through those challenges in a way that maintains their sense of passion and energy for the work.

Highlight that according to the research done by Maslach and Leiter, most employees in the United States fit into the engaged worker profile. (Maslach & Leiter, 2022).

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Slide #24: How Does Someone Get There?

Share that most people do not start out in a new job feeling burned out. In fact, most workers have energy, excitement, and passion for a new workplace, so how do they get to the point of burning out?

Explain that burnout arises when employees recognize that the workplace fails to meet their needs in six key areas:

- Workload
- Control
- Rewards
- Community
- Fairness
- Values

Explain that each category represents an important element to having engaged workers in the workplace. A worker will experience full burnout if they feel:

- Their workload is too high
- They don't have sufficient control in their work tasks
- There are not sufficient rewards associated with the work
- There's a breakdown in community
- There is a lack of fairness in the policies or practices
- There are significant values conflicts

<u>Activity: Personal Burnout Reflection (15 minutes)</u>
Small group and large group discussion

Instructions:

1. **Divide** the learners into groups of three to five. **Explain** they will have 10 minutes for discussion in their small groups.

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2. **Invite** the group to reflect and share about a workplace that matched them well in many or most areas discussed in the slide.
3. **Invite** them to share with their small group answers to these three questions:
    a. What stands out to you about that workplace?
    b. How did you feel at that workplace?
    c. How did that impact your work behaviors and motivation?

4. In addition, **invite** them to compare that to a workplace that had significant mismatches in one or most areas.
5. **Invite** them to discuss the same questions in the small group:
    a. What stands out to you about that workplace?
    b. How did you feel at that workplace?
    c. How did that impact your work behaviors and motivations

6. **Send** them to their groups.

Bring the whole group back together and invite them to share some themes about how the matches and mismatches impacted the worker's motivation and attitude toward their work.

Allow learners 5 minutes to share.

Thank the learners for their intentional engagement in the activity.

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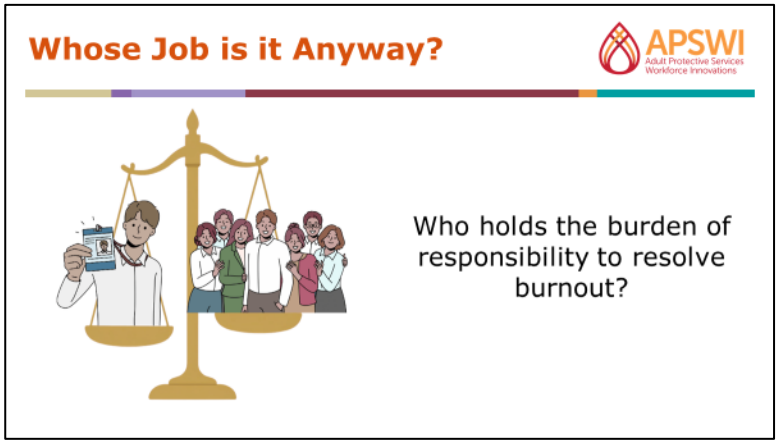
Slide #25: Whose Job is it Anyway?



Review that a person goes from engaged to burned out in their job when they begin to feel that the work requirements are out of sync with their needs. (Maslach & Leiter, 2022)

Explain that a common narrative regarding burnout is that employees need to address the problem on an individual level. Organizational leaders commonly suggest that if employees take better care of themselves, then they wouldn't experience burnout. Additionally, a burned-out employee is often invited to take time off to address their burnout symptoms. There are two challenges with this approach:

- The organizational mismatches persist whether or not the employee is engaging in self-care.
- It places the burden of responsibility to fix the burnout problem on the individual and ignores the organizational responsibilities

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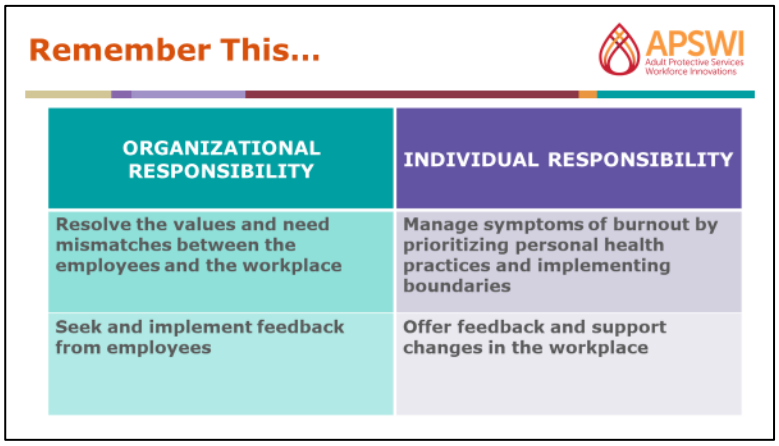
Slide #26: Remember This…



Emphasize that the responsibility to resolve burnout is both organizational and individual:

- The organization is responsible for resolving values and needs mismatches between the organization and its employees.
- The individual is responsible for caring for their own health and implementing work/life boundaries in the face of burnout.
- The organization must be willing to seek and implement input from their employees.
- The employees must be willing to offer input and support the change process.

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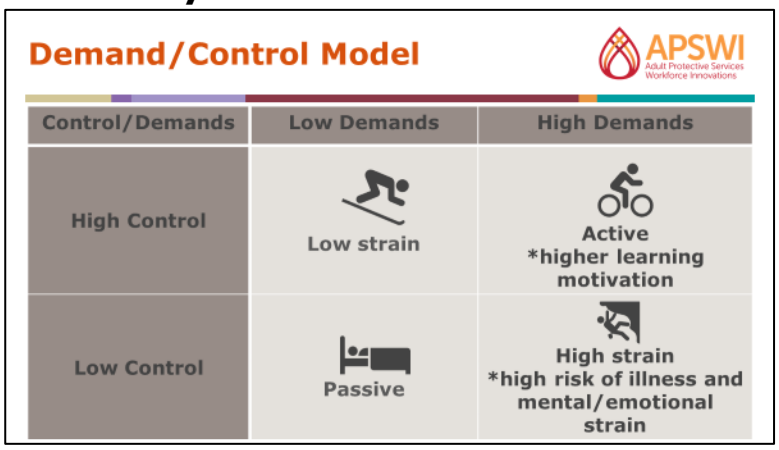
Slide #27: Demand/Control Model



Explain that a concept that can bridge these two paradoxical ideas is to understand the role of control in the workplace. We often talk about stress at work by saying that there is "too much to do". However,

- research suggests that stress at work has less to do with workload
- and more to do with the employee's sense of control in their work (de Jonge et al., 2010).

In fact, those who are often most engaged in their work are those who have both high demands and report a high sense of control. On the other hand, those with high demands and low control are at highest risk for physical illness and mental or emotional strain related to their job.

Reiterate that a sense of control over your work moderates the impacts of a high workload.

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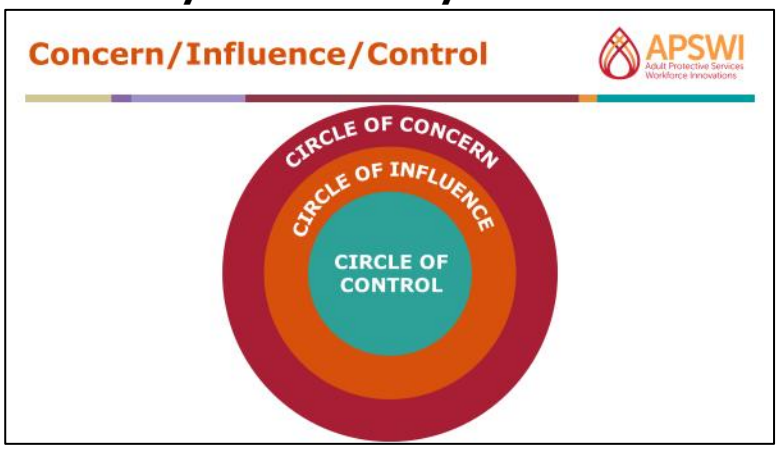
Slide #28: Concern/Influence/Control



Explain that control is not just something given or taken away, it also involves developing a mindset that has strong ties to one's overall wellbeing. When evaluating one's control over challenges in the workplace, it is a helpful practice to sort elements of the challenges into one of three categories;

- concern
- influence
- control

Explain the differences between the circle of concern, influence and control:

- The circle of concern encompasses elements of a challenge that are out of one's direct control but are still directly impactful.
    - Examples include: law, policy, or the choices of other people.
- The circle of control encompasses elements of the challenge that one has direct control over.
    - Examples include: one's own values, beliefs, behaviors and coping.
- The circle of influence is the blend of concern and control. It encompasses elements of the challenge that may not be in one's direct control but could be influenced by factors that are within one's control. (Schaffner, 2025)

Examples include:

- A student cannot control the questions on a test (circle of concern), but they can control how well they study and prepare (circle of control) which will likely reflect in the grade they get (circle of influence).
- In the workplace, an employee cannot control how well their team functions, but they can influence a sense of teamwork and comradery

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through their own words, body language and willingness to connect with and support others.

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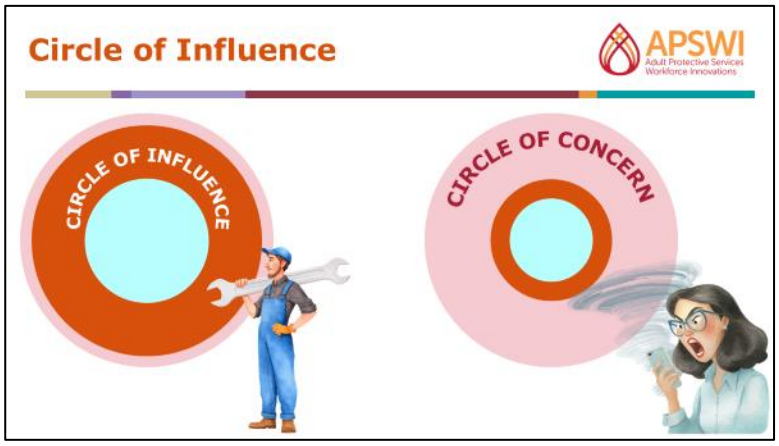
Slide #29: Circle of Influence



Explain that an individual's circle of influence can shrink and expand based on a number of factors, including:

- Systemic constraints: prevent an employee from having autonomy in parts of their job that directly impact them
  - Example: a county might have limited resources to support the needs of the client
- External circumstances: include sociocultural elements that influence customs, traditions, and trends
  - Example: a hardworking, yet introverted employee might get passed up on promotions or opportunities because the organizational culture favors more extroverted individuals for their leadership team
- Individual outlook: pessimistic people tend to view their world with a narrower circle of influence, while individuals who are optimistic report wider circle of influence, which is also called an "illusion of control" (McKenna, 1993).
  - While pessimistic individuals tend to be more realistic, optimistic individuals tend to experience a greater sense of overall wellbeing. Sometimes by choosing to be realistic we sacrifice feeling content.

Clarify that it is normal for your circle of influence to grow and shrink because it means that you are testing the limits of what you can influence. You might find in this process of testing the limits of your influence that you:

- Make positive changes in areas of your work life that you never considered before which could result in feeling a greater sense of control over your work.

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- Discover parts of your work life that you thought you could influence but are out of your control. This could understandably lead to feelings of frustration or anger.

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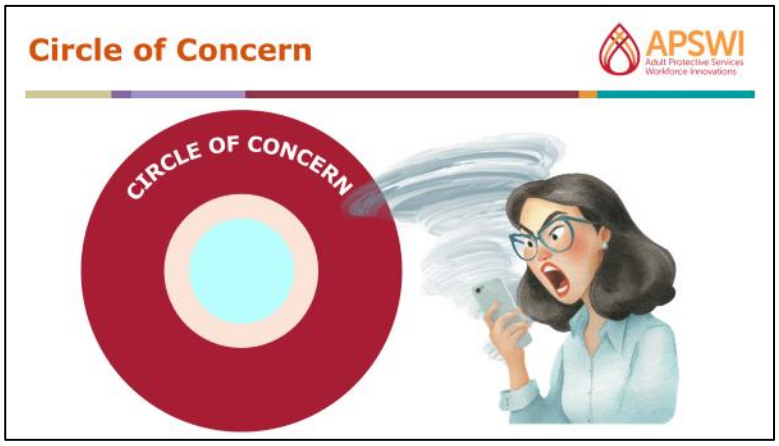
Slide #30: Circle of Concern



Emphasize that it is normal to experience frustration and anger when dealing with elements of a challenge that are in the circle of concern.

Remind learners about the Demand/Control model which illustrates that there is a significantly positive impact on our wellbeing when we feel that we have autonomy and control in our work.

Explain that for line staff, there are many elements of their job that are out of their control, and there are helpful ways to approach these elements even when they contribute to their experience of burnout.

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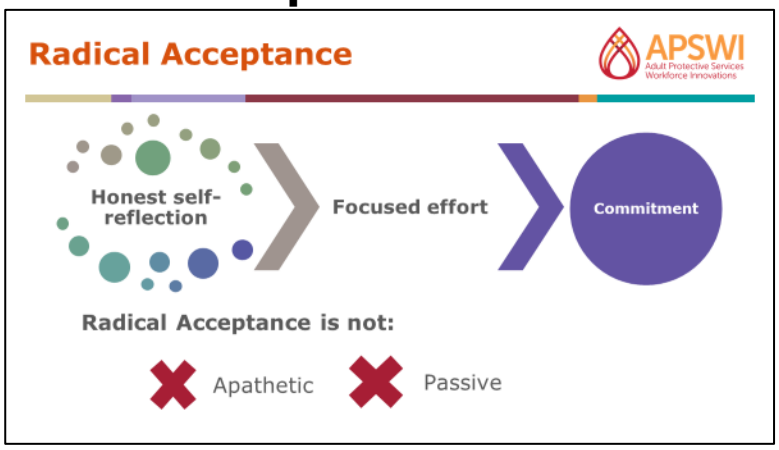
Slide #31: Radical Acceptance



Explain that a useful skill for managing feelings of frustration and anger for elements of a challenge that are in the circle of concern is called radical acceptance.

Trainer Note: Radical acceptance is a distress tolerance skill that comes from Dialectic Behavioral Therapy (DBT). DBT is a cognitive behavioral therapy developed by Marsha Linehan aimed at supporting people with managing intense emotions, reducing harmful behaviors, and improving relationships. It blends concepts of classic behavioral therapy with mindfulness practices into concrete skills.

Define radical acceptance as an intentional acknowledgement that there are some things in our lives that cause us suffering and pain and are out of our direct control (Linehan, 2015).

Explain that radical acceptance is not apathetic nor passive. It requires:

- Honest self-reflection on the things that are within our direct control
- Focused effort to properly sort elements of our challenges into their respective circles of concern, influence and control
- Commitment to channeling our energy and time into the elements that are within our influence or control

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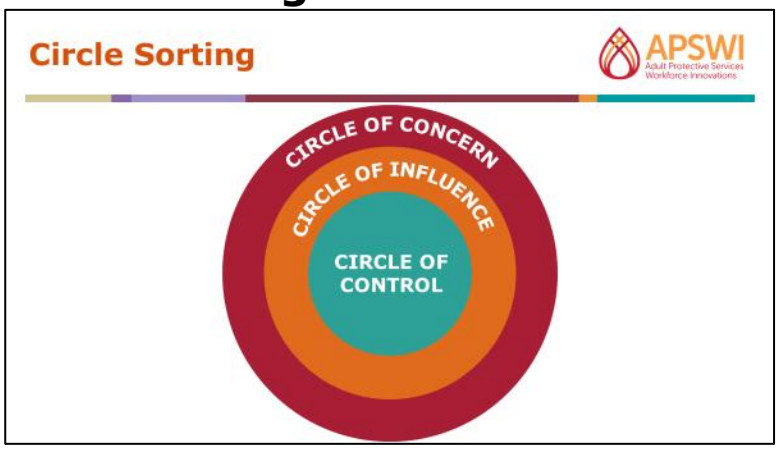
Slide #32: Circle Sorting



Activity: Circle Sorting (5-7 minutes)
Large group discussion

Read the scenario below

Jenna (she/her) is a busy APS professional working with an older adult, Anita (she/her) who is consistently being reported for self-neglect by doctors and other local professionals who are mandated reporters. Anita is skipping her medical appointments, not taking her medications and has physical limitations that prevent her from taking care of some basic hygiene needs. Additionally, Anita lives in a rural area where there are very limited resources that would help her better meet her basic needs. Anita has declined all protective services that would require her to move out of her home or invite strangers into her home.

Jenna is feeling frustrated because she feels like she cannot help Anita, but due to the frequent reports she is often going out to visit her. Jenna is beginning to dread these visits because she doesn't know how to make her time with Anita productive.

Ask the group to identify the elements of this scenario that are in Jenna's circle of concern (those things she cannot directly control).

Reinforce in the discussion that Jenna is likely feeling frustrated because she is trying to "help" Anita in ways that Anita doesn't want to be helped.

Ask the group "what advice would you give Jenna that might help her reduce her frustration by focusing on the things over which she has influence or control?"

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Invite learners to put their thoughts in the chat or raise their hand and come off mute to share.

Emphasize in the discussion that Jenna has opportunities to build a meaningful relationship with Anita even if Anita doesn't accept protective services at her visits. **Reinforce** that relationship building is always a helpful intervention when time and resources are limited.

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Slide #33: Change the Goal

Emphasize that in helping professions, the goal isn't always fixing problems for people. Humans are wired to heal in the context of connection, so most often, they want to feel seen and understood. When the helping professional has reached the edge of their circle of influence, the best thing they can do is

- provide those they serve with genuine human connection.
    - This kind of intervention hits at the core of what makes a job meaningful and satisfying.
    - It is important to remember that it is still productive to provide compassionate care, even when the challenges persist.

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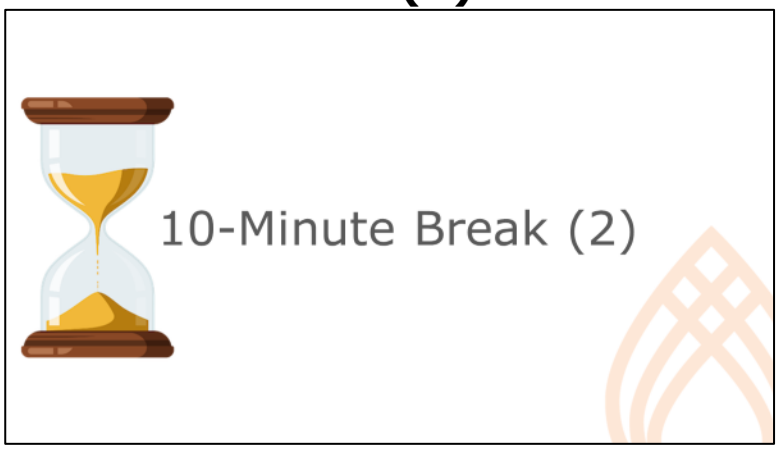
Slide #34: 10-Minute Break (2)



Instructions for the break:

1. **Invite** the learners to try using this break only for meeting their own personal needs and avoid doing work tasks for at least half of the break time.
2. **Invite** learners to be mindful of how it feels to take care of themselves at work. Mention that it might feel uncomfortable to prioritize needs of self while "on the clock" and **encourage** learners to sit with the discomfort instead of rushing to do work tasks.
3. **Provide** 10-minutes for the break if possible, shorten if needed.
4. When the break is over, engage in a small group discussion about the learner's insights:
    a. What made it easy to use this break time for personal needs?
    b. What barriers came up?
    c. How can you implement this practice of taking short, scheduled breaks throughout the workday on a typical day?

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Building Resilience

Time Allotted: 70 minutes

Associated Objective(s): Recognize the symptoms of workplace stress on an individual level; Identify a variety of interventions to increase personal resilience.

Method: Instruction, Group Discussion, Personal Reflection

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Slide #35: Building Resilience in the Circle of Control

Explain that the remainder of the training will be dedicated to focusing on the learner's circle of control through empowering them with knowledge and skills on how they can build resilience in this challenging work.

Define the term resilience as the ability to navigate through stressful situations in an intentional way and eventually return the body's nervous system to a place of rest and recovery when the stressful situation has ended.

Explain that these resilience-building concepts will touch on a variety of workplace stress experiences and can support learners in identifying and practicing the right skill for the right situation.

Remind learners that not every intervention will work for every situation because there are a variety of reasons, they are stressed at work.

Explain that in this training, the resilience-building skills will be split up by:

- Self-awareness skills (fingerprint symbol)
- Intentional engagement skills (footprint symbol)
- Skillful intervention skills (hand holding plant symbol)

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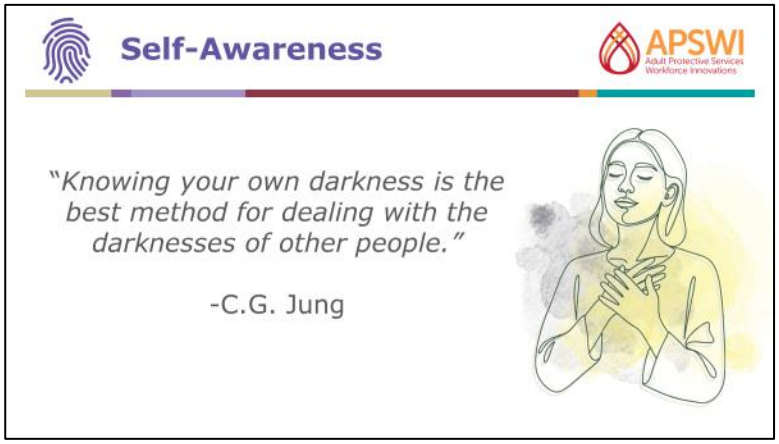
Slide #36: Self-Awareness



Trainer Note: Read the Carl Jung quote on the PowerPoint slide

Explain that people who experience trauma or unique challenges in life are often drawn to a helping profession that allows them to care for suffering people or solve problems that mirror the problems they have faced in their personal life. For example, someone who was raised in the child welfare system might choose to be a case worker or someone who had a mother living with a bipolar diagnosis, might become a mental health counselor.

Group Activity: My Why (3-5 minutes)
Virtual chat discussion or Mentimeter

1. **Invite** learners to reflect on the reasons they choose to work for Adult Protective Services.
2. **Ask** them to personally identify experiences in their lives that might give them passion or drive for this work.
3. **Prompt** learners to put an answer to the question "why APS?" in the chat. Instruct them to leave out personal details and keep their answers brief. Let them know that they will not be called on to expound on their answers.

Trainer Note: Allow learners one to two minutes to construct a thoughtful response, then choose a handful of responses to read out loud that represent a variety of reasons why they choose to work for APS.

Explain that having personal connections to our work gives us special empathy for the clients we serve. It also makes us more vulnerable to experiencing workplace stressors like secondary traumatic stress and empathic distress/compassion fatigue because the material we work with reaches some of

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our most vulnerable parts. Therefore, it is vital to invest in knowing yourself—your vulnerabilities, strengths, skills and weaknesses.

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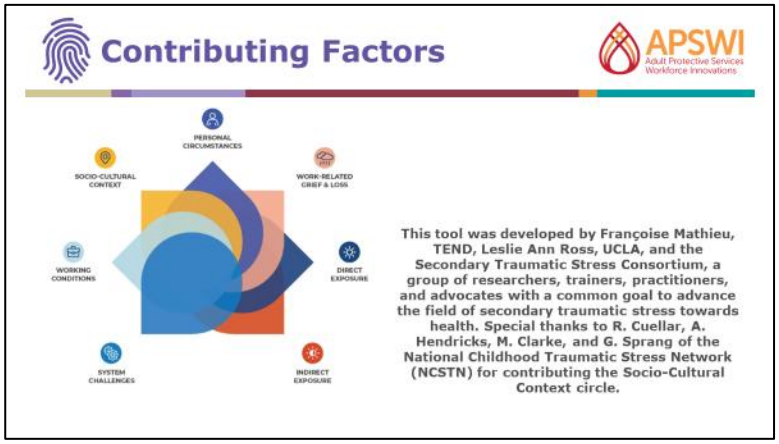
Slide #37: Contributing Factors



Explain experts in the field of secondary traumatic stress created this tool to support helping professionals to understand their own risks. It can help you as an APS professional to highlight contributing factors that might lead to burnout, secondary traumatic stress, empathic distress or moral distress.

<u>Activity: Secondary Traumatic Stress Contributing Factors (5-7 minutes)</u>
Personal Reflection activity

1. **Invite** learners to use the **Handout: Contributing Factors** (Handout is located in their Participant Manual) to start to reflect and write down personal examples from each category of the contributing factors as the trainer explains them. Encourage learners to write as many as they can think of and return to complete their answers when time allows.
2. **Inform** learners that they will not be asked to share their contributing factors and encourage them to have an honest self-assessment.
3. **Explain** each contributing factor and allow 30 seconds after each contributing factor:
    - System challenges refers to the barriers in the organizational system that prevents you from providing quality services to your clients.
    - Working conditions refers to the matches or mismatches discussed earlier in the discussion on burnout (workload, control, rewards, community, fairness, and values).
    - Socio-cultural context refers to the intersection of factors that defines your identity (ex. race, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, historic trauma, etc.) with the social or political environment in which you live and work.

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- Personal circumstances refers to your own personality, coping styles or factors in your personal life like demands and responsibilities. (ex. caregiving, mental health challenges, difficulty with change)
- Work-related grief and loss refers to natural emotions that arise from unwelcome or unanticipated change in the workplace (ex. Loss of a mentor through job change or promotion, changing a team, death of a colleague)
- Direct exposure refers to the traumatic events that happen to you directly, or your own primary trauma related to your work and life. Remember that helping professionals often choose a field of work that relates closely to their primary trauma.
- Indirect exposure refers to your interaction with the trauma of other people, or secondary trauma (TEND Academy, n.d.)

Remind learners that what they wrote down are their own personal vulnerability factors that would contribute to the experience of burnout, secondary traumatic stress, empathic distress or moral distress.

Explain that having this knowledge will help learners build the very important skill of self-validation when they begin to see warning signs of stress in the workplace. If you start to notice yourself more activated by a specific investigation, you might repeat this exercise to gain clarity as to why you are more vulnerable. You might discover that this case is similar to a trauma you personally experienced; or you might discover that you are grieving over a loss of a mentor in the workplace. Having this awareness will support you in focusing your self-care efforts on your most vulnerable parts.

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Handout: Contributing Factors Worksheet

CONTRIBUTING FACTOR	**How is this contributing factor manifesting in your own work life? Think about how it is impacting your stress in the workplace positively and/or negatively.**
System challenges: barriers in the organizational system	
Working conditions: value matches/mismatches with your employer	
Socio-cultural context: identity factors in context of your social or political environment	
Personal circumstances: personality, coping styles, factors of your personal life	
Work-related grief and loss: emotions from unwelcome or unanticipated changes in the workplace	
Direct exposure: your primary trauma at work	
Indirect exposure: your exposure to secondary trauma at work	

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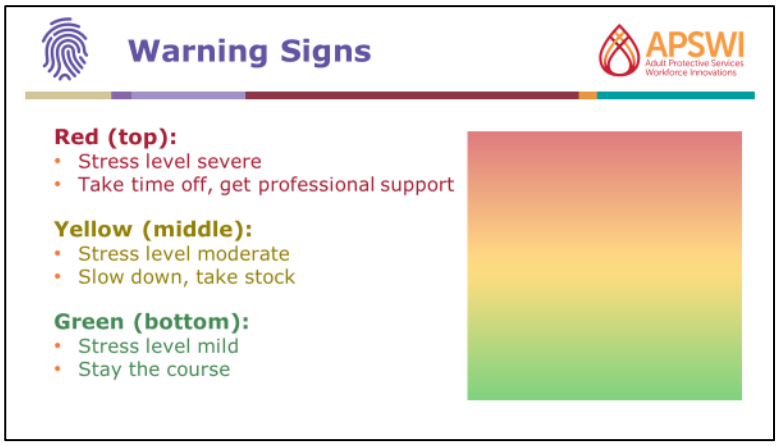
Slide #38: Warning Signs



Explain that understanding personal warning signs of workplace stress will help to alert you that you need to intervene before the stress escalates. It will also help you to intervene with the appropriate level of intensity.

Describe personal warning signs in context of a stoplight.

- Green indicates that stress levels are normal, you are able to recover well and that what you are doing to stay personally healthy is effective in those circumstances.
- Yellow warning signs indicate that the stress levels are moderate, it might be more difficult to recover after a stressful event, possibly the stress of work is infiltrating personal life or is showing up uninvited. This means that you may need to slow down and evaluate if you need to intervene with a different set of skills.
- Red warning signs indicate that the stress levels are severe. If in the red zone, you are likely having stress reactions at home or at work and the best course of action is to take time off and/or seek professional support.

Explain that when we evaluate our stress warning signs, we want to consider physical signs (sick stomach, headache, low energy, lack of motivation), emotional signs (irritable, depressed, avoidant, anxious) and behavioral signs (isolating, using substances more than usual, getting into relationship conflicts).(Mathieu, 2012)

Activity: Personal Warning Signs (3-minutes)
Personal reflection activity

Trainer Note: Within boundaries you're comfortable with, be prepared to give examples of your own personal warning signs for each category. Personally consider how you feel physically and emotionally and how you behave in the green zone, yellow zone and red zone.

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Instructions:

1. **Explain** that using the concepts that green equals mild stress level, yellow equals moderate stress level and red equals a severe stress level, fill out the **Handout: My Warning Signs** in your Trainer Manual.
2. **Provide** personal examples of your own warning signs in each of the categories.
3. **Invite** learners to reflect on their own warning signs and fill them out in their participant manual.
4. **Inform** learners that they will not be asked to share their specific warning signs with the group and encourage them to use this time for an honest self-assessment.

After 30 seconds to one minute of personal reflection time **ask** learners to use the thumbs up reaction button if their warning signs were mostly:

- physical in nature
- emotional in nature
- behavioral in nature

Explain that everyone experiences stress in a unique way and that understanding their personal manifestations of stress will help them to intervene with resilience skills in the yellow zone instead of waiting until the red zone to make needed changes.

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Handout: My Warning Signs

Stress Level	Physical Signs	Emotional Signs	Behavioral Signs
Green – Mild Stress Level			
Yellow – Moderate Stress Level			
Red – Severe Stress Level			

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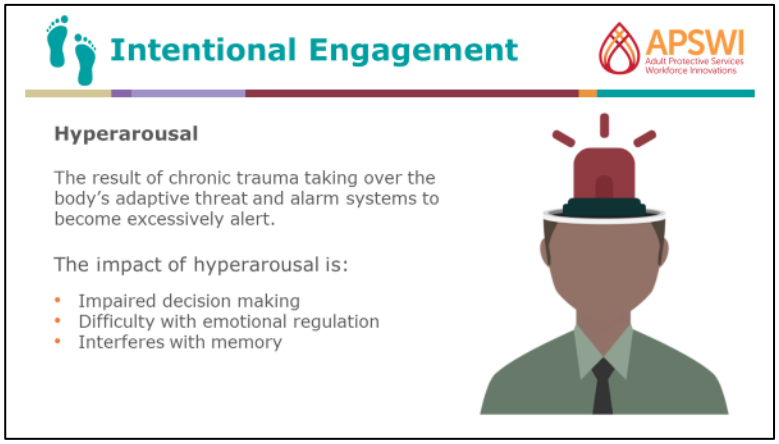
Slide #39: Intentional Engagement



Explain that when the learners are better able to recognize their vulnerability factors and warning signs, they will be better able to engage with their work intentionally instead of reactively.

Describe that the human nervous system has an important responsibility of alerting the body to potential threat. Signals are received through the five senses to prepare the body with automatic survival responses:

- fight
- flight or
- freeze

Once the signals are received, it takes nanoseconds for the body's circulatory system to respond by preparing the muscular system for action.

- The lungs start demanding faster breaths.
- The heart starts pumping to send oxygenated blood to the muscles.
- The pupils of the eyes dilate to provide a sharper view of the surroundings.
- The body is ready for action.

Explain that when the body remains in this activated state for long periods of time, it begins to take over by

- impairing decision making
- overwhelming emotional regulation
- interfering with memory

Explain like a smoke alarm positioned above a cooking stove, it goes off at every sign of heat, whether or not the danger is present. This is called *hyperarousal*, and it is the opposite of "intentional engagement."

Emphasize that stress is meant to be a short term and reactive state. However, in the modern world of work, it is common for employees to remain in a state of

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chronic stress. For employees who are also frequently exposed to traumatic material in their work, they can easily remain in a state of hyperarousal which leads to those “red zone” warning signs.

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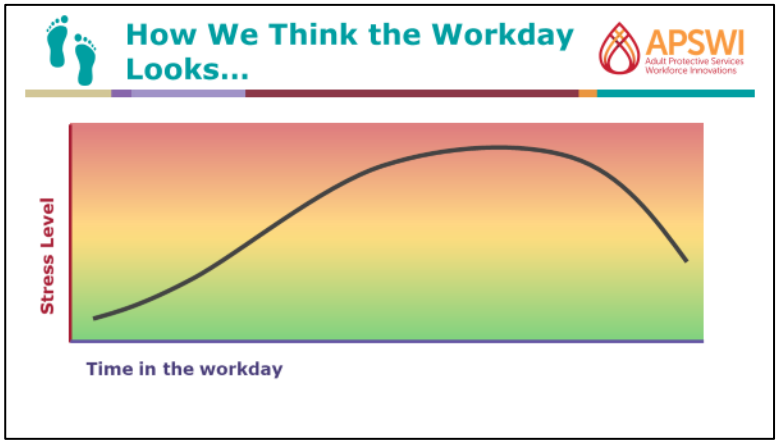
Slide #40: How We Think the Workday Looks…



Explain that this state of chronic stress leads employees to perceive their work as one big stressful experience that they need to "gear up" for.

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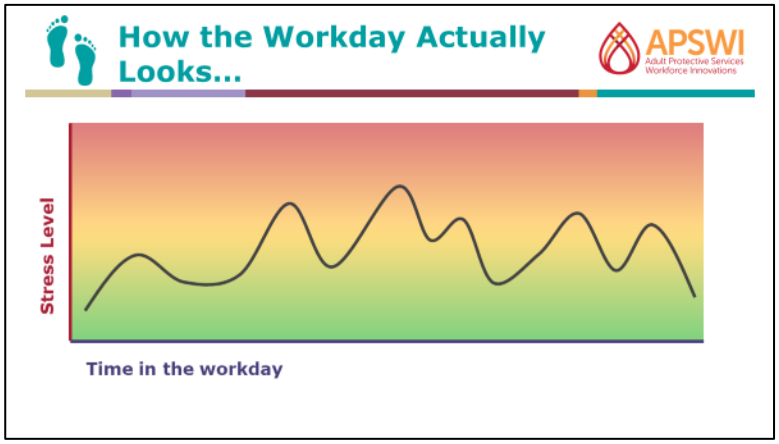
Slide #41: How the Workday Actually Looks…



Explain that in reality, the workday is an ebb and flow of stressful events that each have their own beginning, middle, and end.

Describe that the impact of seeing the workday as one singular stressful event is that we accumulate all of the stress from the day like a bucket filling with water and then wait until they end the workday to empty our heavy and overflowing bucket.

Explain that the challenge with this approach is that we become so worn out by the accumulated stress that we reactively collapse into any comforting activity that does not require thought or intention.

Provide this or another similar example of this pattern:

- "I was so exhausted when I got home that I fell onto the couch and made it two minutes into a show before I was out cold. I finally woke up at 11:30 and went to bed."

Emphasize that this daily cycle of winding up and crashing down often wreaks havoc in our personal lives.

- it can cause isolation in our most important relationships
- take us away from hobbies that used to bring joy
- suck the meaning out of our lives outside of work

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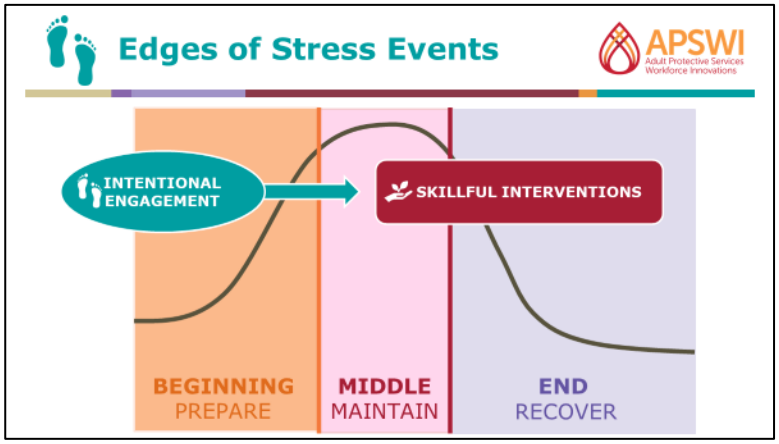
Slide #42: Edges of Stress Events



Trainer Note: This slide has animations.

Explain that intentional engagement means that we begin to detect the edges of the stress events throughout the workday, noticing that each little event has a beginning, middle and end.

Define:

- The *beginning* of the stress event as the time that the body charges up the nervous system to prepare the body for focus and action
- The *middle* of the stress event as the time when the body maintains the alertness and physical preparation to stay engaged
- The *end* of the stress event is the time that the body slows down and begins to send cues of the body's biological needs like food or rest in order to recover from the impact of the stress (Miller, 2025).

Trainer Note: Click to reveal additional words

Explain that intentional engagement with the beginning of a stress event allows us to use skillful interventions in the middle and at the end. This helps us to:

- recover after each stress event
- not accumulate stress throughout the day relying on efforts to recover from it all after work
- preserves and protects our energy so the end of the day is less likely to come with a crash.

Inform learners that there are ways to intentionally engage at each check point of our body's stress process to support a balanced flow of activation and recovery.

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Slide #43: Beginning of the Stress Event

Explain that when we are in a reactive state, there are two ways our bodies will naturally approach another person in distress

- Avoidance: like a hazmat suit, an avoidant approach keeps clients at an emotional "arm's length", shutting off empathic connections to "protect" ourselves from the emotional contagion effect of their trauma. For example, we might say something like this, "At the end of the day, it's the client's problem. They need to be the one that fixes their own issues. There's not much I can do for them."
- Overinvolvement: this happens when we "get in the trenches" with the trauma and become so empathically connected with the client that we begin to have trouble distinguishing between our own emotions and the client's emotions. For example, we might say something like this, "I can't stand the system! It's always failing my clients. What is the point of this job if we can't even help people?"

Highlight that both of these approaches represent the body's natural reactive reactions to trauma and stress.

- The avoidant approach draws on the body's avoidance response to danger.
    - When we take this approach, we are reacting to the trauma of another person as if it is dangerous to our own wellbeing.
- The overinvolved approach draws on the body's instinctive empathic wiring that makes healthy communities possible.
    - When we take this approach, we are responding to the trauma of another person as if it is our own which interfere with our ability to support the client in finding creative solutions.

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Slide #44: Another Approach

Explain that an intentional way to engage with our body's reactive approaches to trauma and stress is to be a window.

- In good weather, windows can be opened to invite and connect.
- In adverse weather, windows can be closed to protect.

Explain that because the window is transparent, even when it is closed there is still an awareness of and connection to what is happening on the other side. Likewise, we can approach the trauma of others with an empathic connection while still remaining grounded. This combination of empathy and groundedness supports us in creating meaningful human connection while still maintaining our capacity for creative problem solving.

Explain that each of you might discover that you tend to take one reactive approach (hazmat or mud run) more often than another. Neither approach is more virtuous than the other. Those who tend to get overly engaged are not better than those who avoid.

Clarify that both avoidance and overinvolvement are adaptive and come with unhelpful consequences. Both approaches are reactive and require skillful intervention to respond in an intentional and supportive way.

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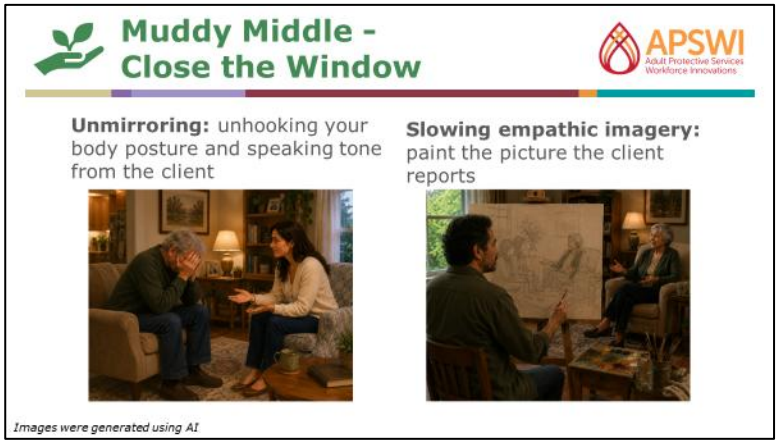
Slide #45: The Muddy Middle - Close the Window



Explain that for those who tend to "get in the mud" with their clients and manifest their emotions through feelings of frustration, anger or hopelessness, there are two skills that can support them to take an intentional approach to "close the window".

1. Unmirroring:
    - **Explain** that the nervous system has special cells called mirror neurons that specialize in learning through observation of another. These neurons are especially active in an empathic state. This means that it is instinctive for the body to begin modeling the physical state of the person we are helping.
    - **Describe** that unmirroring is a skill of self-observation. When you notice that your body language and speaking tone are starting to match your client's, make a change by:
        - Opening up your posture
        - Sitting comfortably and relaxed, but straight
        - Uncrossing your arms and legs
        - Planting your feet flat on the ground
        - Speak with a gentle, easy tone
        - Use natural and hopeful words
    - **Note** that this change could even activate the mirror neurons of your client and they might start sitting and speaking like you (Rothschild, 2006).
2. Slowing empathic imagery:
    - **Explain** that in an empathic state of mind, it is natural to imagine yourself or a loved one in the situation of the person you are supporting. Example: "If this were my mother, I would do anything to prevent this from happening again"

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- **Clarify** that the challenge with this instinctive reaction can be that we become so entwined with the emotions of the situation that we risk:
    - Projecting our own emotions on the client
    - Compromising our ability to find solutions
    - Making false assumptions about what the client needs based on our own experiences
- **Explain** how to slow down the empathic imagery:
    - Imagine that you are a painter and the client's story is the subject of your painting.
    - Make an intentional effort to only paint mental images and details that the client expresses
    - Leave out details that your own mind fills in connected to your personal experiences or perspective.
    - Channel all your mental focus on understanding the situation from the client's perspective by asking questions and observing the client's reactions. (Tikasz, 2023)

Explain that these skills are especially helpful for those experiencing empathic distress.

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Slide #46: The Sterile Middle - Open the Window

Explain that for those who tend to put on a hazmat suit to approach another's trauma and might avoid connecting with their clients even in "good weather", there are skillful interventions to help them "open the window" and connect in meaningful and restorative ways.

1. *Make observations*:
    - **Explain** that this skill uses the yellow warning signs as an alert to the need of a skillful intervention. Common warning signs might be:
        - Irritation
        - Avoidance of a certain client
        - Feeling rushed or hurried when working with clients.
    - **Describe** the skill as intentionally slowing down the conversation or visit by:
        - Providing a short summary of the client's words
        - Reflecting the feelings the client is likely experiencing
        - Asking a question to make sure your observation was accurate (Ex. "It seems like your son's hurtful comments made it hard for you to trust him, but you were afraid that he would leave if you let him know how you really felt. Did I understand that correctly?")
2. *Interconnectedness:*
    - ***Remind*** *learners that* human behavior can be baffling because each person has a unique set of challenges and life experiences.
        - It is natural to our brains to make judgements of the rightfulness or wrongfulness of the decisions of others.
        - This natural response disconnects us from meaningful, re-energizing interactions with those we serve.
    - **Explain** that whenever we find ourselves confused or judgmental of our clients, it can help to:

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- Reflect on everything we know about the person we are supporting, including the emotions they are experiencing
- Connect with a time when we felt those same emotions.

Explain that this practice is not the same as getting "stuck" in empathic imagery. **Clarify** that this exercise is focused reflecting on the experience of an emotion in general rather than imagining ourselves in the client's situation.

Explain that the purpose of this practice is to help us remember that all humans are connected through the experience of emotion. Although we may not agree with another person's choices, we can understand how their emotions influence their decisions, which can soften our response toward those who seem very different from us.(Singer & Bolz, 2013)

Direct learners to the **Handout: Skills to Approach the Trauma of Others** located in their participant manual as a "quick guide" of the elements we just reviewed.

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Handout: Skills to Approach the Trauma of Others

Close the Window when Becoming Overinvolved	Open the Window when Becoming Avoidant
Unmirorring	**Make Observations**
When you notice that your body language, emotions and speaking tone are starting to match the person you are supporting: • Open up your posture • Sit comfortably and relaxed, but straight • Uncross your arms and legs • Plant your feet flat on the ground • Speak with a gentle, easy tone • Use natural and hopeful words	When you find yourself feeling irritated, avoidant or rushed with clients, slow down the conversation by: • Providing a short summary of the client's words • Reflecting the feelings the client is likely experiencing • Asking a question to make sure your observation was accurate
Slowing Empathic Imagery	**Interconnectedness**
When you notice that you are placing yourself, your perspective, or the situation of your loved one's in the story of your client: • Imagine you are a painter and the client's story is the subject of your painting. • Make an intentional effort to only paint mental images and detail that the client expresses. • Leave out details that your own mind fills in connected to your own experiences or perspectives. • Channel all your mental focus on understanding the situation from the client's perspective by asking questions and observing the client's reactions.	When you find yourself confused, baffled by, or judgmental of the choices of your client: • Reflect on the emotions they are likely experiencing. • Think about a time when you felt those same emotions. • Connect to the empathy you have for that client based on their emotional state regardless of your agreement of understanding of their choices and circumstances. • Lean into a compassionate approach by softening yourself towards another human being experiencing distressing or disruptive emotions.

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Handout: Skills to Approach the Trauma of Others Cont.

Slowing Empathic Imagery	Interconnectedness
	Remember: 1. You are connecting with the other person based on their emotional state, but you are remaining separated and grounded in your own emotional state. The goal is to soften our approach, not swing into empathic distress. 2. Compassion is not condoning. We are able to understand the distressing emotions of another person and see how those emotions may have influenced them to make harmful choices, but we are not condoning those harmful choices.

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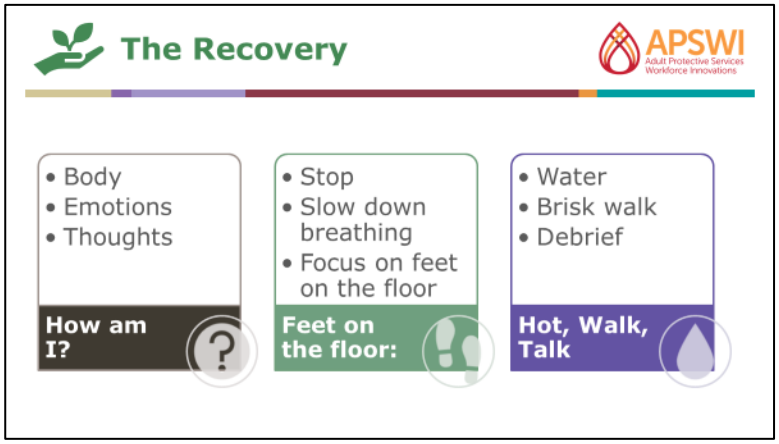
Slide #47: The Recovery



Review that skillful intervention in the middle of a stressful event leads to skillful recovery at the end.

Explain that one of the most common barriers to self-care at work is the perception that there is not enough time in the workday.

- This belief stems from the misconception that recovery from stress is a time-consuming process.
- In reality, this is reinforced by a pattern of accumulating stress throughout the day and attempting to recover from it all at once after work.

Compare this to the difference between cleaning up small messes as they occur versus waiting until the end of the day, when spills have spread and become harder to manage.

- When we delay "cleaning up" our stress until the end of the workday, the resulting exhaustion can leave us with little capacity for anything beyond recovery.

Explain that in reality, we only need a few focused minutes of recovery throughout the day to reset the nervous system and allow us to return to work with greater ease and clarity.

- The simple goal of recovery is to get our nervous system out of an overly activated state and back to a resting state.
- This can be done with a few simple steps (discussed below).

Note that the most appropriate time to recover from a stressful event is when we are out of the stressful event.

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- We should not be using recovery skills if we are in the middle of an event that requires alertness and action to maintain physical safety.
- Once we are fully removed from the event and physically safe, that is the appropriate time to recover.

Clarify that in the context of an ongoing stressor (ex. high caseloads or a difficult client) recovery should happen frequently throughout the day even though there is not a definitive "end" of the stress event. Anytime there is a natural opportunity for a break or pause, we can engage in a nervous system recovery.

Invite learners for this next section, to follow along using the **Handout: Skills for Recovery** located in their participant Manual.

Teach the following steps to recovery:

1. **How am I?**
    - Do a quick self-assessment, ask yourself, "How am I?"
        - Avoid asking
            - "how should I be?"
            - "how do I wish I am?"
            - "how do I want to be in front of my supervisor?"
    - Honestly pay attention to your
        - **Physical body** (ex. Heart racing, muscles shaking, big energy, exhaustion, trouble slowing down, trouble starting up)
        - **Emotions** (ex. angry, sad, hopeless, anxious)
        - **Thoughts** (ex. "I want to go home", "I don't want to see anyone", "I don't know what to do", "I am not safe anymore")(Lipsky & Burk, 2009)
2. Take one to three minutes to ground yourself to the present moment by focusing your attention on slowing down your breathing and focusing on the sensation of your feet's contact with the floor.
    - The goal of this portion is to maintain steady focus on your feet for 30 seconds to one minute without getting distracted by other thoughts. (Tikasz, n.d.)
3. The last step is optional. If after you've checked in with yourself and have successfully slowed down your breathing and thoughts, and are still activated, then engage in *Hot, Walk and Talk.*
    - Find a trusted colleague who is able and willing to debrief with you, grab a bottle of water and take them on a brisk walk with you while you mindfully debrief the situation. The combination of walking, drinking water and mindfully discussing the challenging event

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successfully metabolizes and flushes cortisol and adrenaline from the body and resets the nervous system. (TEND Academy Ltd., 2025)

Clarify that if there is no opportunity for walking while debriefing, it could be helpful make a plan to get a brisk walk or other form of brief exercise to fully recover and get the physical benefits to the nervous system.

Highlight that debriefing doesn't typically require that we provide every descriptive element of the event to get the recovery benefits, especially if the event is laden with trauma details. While debriefing:

- Be mindful not to unnecessarily spread secondary trauma to your colleague.
- Provide high level details and allow your colleague to ask for more details if they want to know more.
    - (Ex. "her body was covered in painful sores that were infected" vs "she had massive sores all over her body that were oozing puss and blood, they looked extremely painful and were clearly infected.")

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Handout: Skills for Recovery

1. **How am I?**
    a. Physical body (ex. Heart racing, muscles shaking, big energy, exhaustion, trouble slowing down, trouble starting up)
    b. Emotions (ex. Angry, sad, hopeless, anxious)
    c. Thoughts (ex. "I want to go home", "I don't want to see anyone", "I don't know what to do", "I am not safe anymore")

(Lipsky & Burk, 2009)

2. **Feet on the floor**

Focus your attention on:

    a. Slowing down your breathing (in through the nose, out through the mouth)
    b. Focusing on the sensation of your feet's contact with the floor
    c. Keeping the slower breathing and mental focus for at least 30 seconds

(Tikasz, n.d.)

3. **Hot, Walk, Talk**
    a. Find a trusted colleague and ask permission to debrief with them
    b. Get a bottle of water (yes, water…)
    c. Briskly walk together while you debrief using high level details of the situation

(TEND Academy Ltd., 2025)

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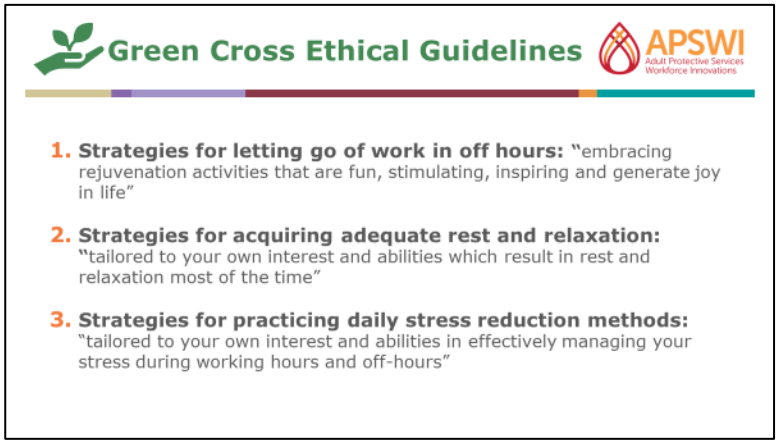
Slide #48: Green Cross Ethical Guidelines



Trainer Note: These ethical guidelines come from the Green Cross Academy of Traumatology which is an international non-profit organization that establishes and maintains standards of care to trauma victims and responders throughout the world. (Green Cross Academy of Traumatology, n.d.) *Please share link in the comments section.*

Explain that skillful intervention for recovery in an ongoing process throughout the workday and after work hours. Researcher, author and secondary traumatic stress expert, Brian Miller describes stress recovery as the intentional "breath out" after the multitude of reactive "breaths in" our bodies take throughout the day (Miller, 2025).

Explain that it is an ethical responsibility towards ourselves and our clients to establish specific goals around our ongoing recovery. Specifically in context of our engagement in

- "fun, stimulating" and "inspiring" activities that "generate joy in life"
- rest and relaxation
- practicing stress reduction strategies

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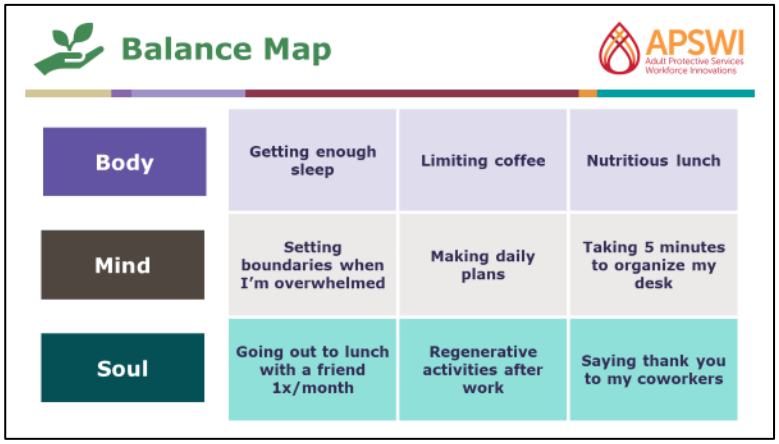
Slide #49: Balance Map



Trainer Note: Feel free to change this slide to represent your own balance map so that you can provide meaningful examples that speak to your own experience.

Explain that a balance map is a simple and intuitive way to create those goals of regenerative activities, rest and relaxation, and stress reduction. The idea of a balance map does not allude to the false belief that we can achieve "true balance" in our lives. It refers to the concept of balancing the body back into a state of equilibrium through skillful intervention for recovery. (Mathieu, n.d.)

Activity: The Balance Map (5 minutes)
Personal Reflection Activity

Refer learners to the **Handout: Balance Map** in their participant manual.
Explain to learners that the balance map has three blank boxes following each category for them to fill out activities or interventions they can implement .

- The top row represents three activities, skills or interventions that intentionally engage or care for the body through sleep, movement or nourishment.
- The middle row represents three activities, skills or interventions that intentionally engage the mind such as learning new skills or getting more training, organizing time or space, or engaging in mind clearing activities.
- The bottom row represents three activities, skills or interventions that intentionally engage the soul such as socialization, interests, or activities that are in alignment with personal values.

Remind learners not to get overly focused on which row to place certain activities, the concepts of "body, mind, soul" are simply gentle prompts to remind them to think holistically about their life and not to get too narrowly focused on one aspect of wellbeing.

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Allow a couple of minutes for learners to start filling out their map. After a few minutes, **explain** they can continue to work on this at a later time and they may find it helpful to revisit the goals they have written down here to help reduce stress.

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Handout: Balance Map

Body			
Mind			
Soul			

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Closing Activity, Review, Evaluation

Time Allotted: 20 minutes

Associated Objective(s): N/A

Method: Instruction, Group Discussion

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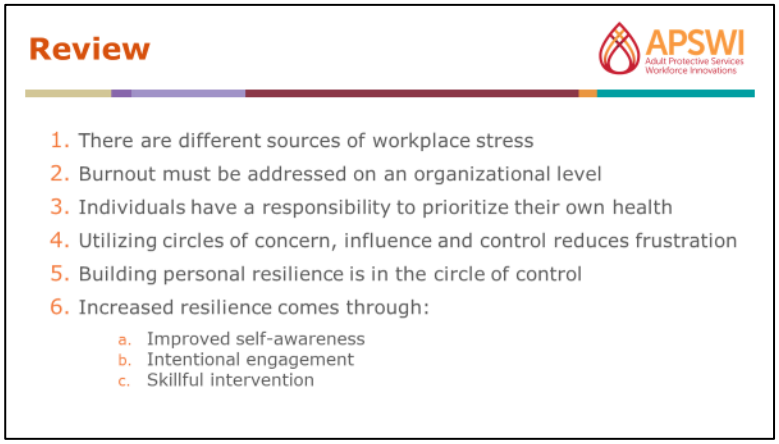
Slide #50: Review



Review the content discussed in the training.

- There are different sources of workplace stress
- Burnout must be addressed on an organizational level
- Individuals have a responsibility to prioritize their own health
- Utilizing circles of concern, influence and control reduces frustration
- Building personal resilience is in the circle of control
- Increased resilience comes through:
    - Improved self-awareness
    - Intentional engagement
    - Skillful intervention

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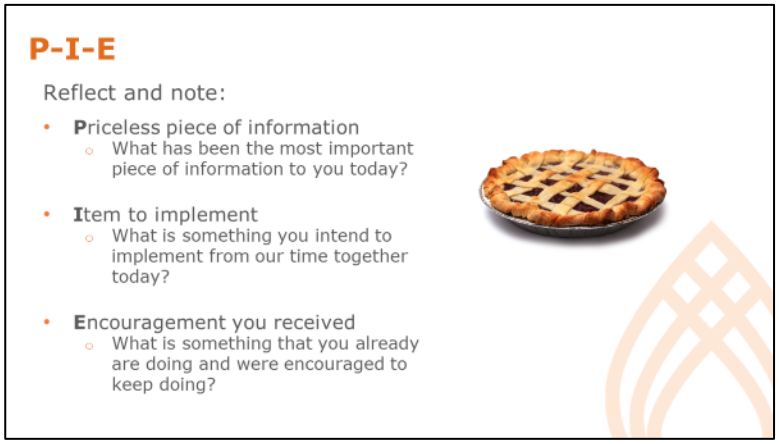
Slide #51: P-I-E Wrap Up



Explain based on what we have talked about during our time together, answer these P.I.E. questions.

1. P – **Priceless** piece of information. What has been the most important piece of information to you today?
2. I – **Item** to implement. What is something you intend to implement from our time today?
3. E – **Encouragement** I received. What is something that I am already doing that I was encouraged to keep on doing?

Allow five minutes to answer the questions on your own. Once complete, **ask** for volunteers to share what they wrote down. If training virtually, request the participants to use the "Raise Hand" feature to volunteer to speak.

Use the following questions for debrief:

- What were some of the key words that you heard while you shared?
- What were the common themes that continue coming up?
- What would it mean for APS if we implemented the things on your PIE?
- What would it mean for APS if we did not implement the things on your PIE?

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Slide #52: Thank You!

Provide any information on how to complete evaluations.

Remind participants how valuable they are and the work they do is to our communities.

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