Secondary Traumatic Stress
Trauma experienced while working in the role of helper has been described as:

- Compassion fatigue
- Secondary traumatic stress (STS)
- Vicarious traumatization

STS is the stress of helping or wanting to help a person who has been traumatized.

Unlike other forms of “burnout,” STS is a result of exposure to clients’ trauma (acute or cumulative).

STS can disrupt child welfare workers’ lives, feelings, personal relationships, and overall view of the world.
Sources of STS

- The death of a child or adult on the worker’s caseload
- Investigating a vicious abuse or neglect report
- Frequent exposure to children’s emotional accounts of traumatic events
- Photographic images of injuries or scenes of a serious injury or death
- Helping to support grieving family members following a child abuse death, including the siblings of the deceased child
- Concerns about agency funding and resources
- Concerns about being publicly scapegoated for a tragic outcome when lacking the means or authority to intervene effectively
Signs & Symptoms

- Avoidance (including of certain clients)
- Preoccupation with clients’/client stories
- Intrusive thoughts/nightmares/flashbacks
- Arousal symptoms
- Thoughts of violence/revenge
- Feeling estranged/isolated/having no one to talk to
- Feeling trapped, “infected” by trauma, hopeless, inadequate
- Having difficulty separating work from personal life
- Sound familiar? Co-Worker?
Self Care

- Methods to control negative thoughts, emotions
- Support from peers, colleagues, family, spiritual leaders
- Diet, exercise, mindfulness, other techniques
Final Exercise - de-stress