

Tumwater Education Association

ADVOCATE

TumwaterEA.org

February 2025



Advocate for change in your district. Connect with your local Union to ensure your district is following state requirements for addressing Secondary Traumatic Stress and to bargain for more supports and protections for educators experiencing STS.

SOURCE: WEA Website

Secondary Traumatic Stress

Support for those who support students

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Secondary trauma can impact our work and homelife as school staff, especially those of us who work closely with students. Secondary Traumatic Stress happens when the emotionally painful experiences of others impact our well-being, leading to compassion fatigue, burnout, and mental health challenges.

Secondary traumatic stress (STS) is the emotional distress that results when an individual hears about the traumatic experiences of another individual. Distress may result from hearing someone's trauma stories, seeing high levels of distress in the aftermath of a traumatic event, needing to retell a student's story, and/or seeing photos or images related to the trauma.

If you're feeling depressed, burned out, anxious, or compassion fatigued, you are not alone. Studies show that educators experience a disproportionate amount of secondary traumatic stress. It's important to know and access the support that is available to you.

[Secondary traumatic stress self-care packet](#)

[SEBB SmartHealth / PEBB SmartHealth](#) has online modules for building resiliency.

Accessing mental health supports through [SEBB plans / PEBB plans](#).

If you're experiencing a crisis or secondary traumatic stress, reach out to your care provider or call the state-wide mental health crisis hotline at 988.

Any professional who works directly with people exposed to trauma and hears them recount their traumatic experiences is at risk of STS. Additional risk factors associated with STS and related conditions for professionals include the following:

- Prior trauma exposure
- Female gender
- Inexperience in the field
- Dose of exposure
- Type of work
- Young age

SOURCE: WEA Website

President's Corner

February is the month of Valentines when we show our loving appreciation for friends and family.

Webster's dictionary says the following:

"Valentine (noun)
val·en·tine 'va-lən-tīn
1: a sweetheart chosen or complimented on Valentine's Day
2a: a gift or greeting sent or given especially to a sweetheart on Valentine's Day
especially: a greeting card sent on this day
b: something (such as a movie or piece of writing) expressing uncritical praise or affection: tribute"

Wikipedia says the following as well:

"The U.S. Greeting Card Association estimates that approximately 190 million Valentines are sent each year in the U.S. Half of those Valentines are given to family members other than a spouse, usually to children. When the Valentine-exchange cards made in school activities are included the figure goes up to 1 billion, and teachers become the people receiving the most Valentines."



What about giving Valentines to ourselves, though? How do we show loving appreciation for ourselves during times when we face workplace stress? What are the ways that we take care of our own hearts so that we may take care of others' hearts? My hope is that you are able to find a way when times are tough.

DJ



Find resources to support your mental health and resilience at <https://wea.mobi/STS>.

Secondary Traumatic Stress

Support for those who support students

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We know that our working conditions are making the prevalence and severity of Secondary Traumatic Stress worse, and together in WEA we're advocating for change. Local Unions across the state are holding districts accountable to the new requirements for recognizing and providing resources for STS. Talk with your building rep or local Union leadership to get involved. Local Unions are also bargaining for contracts that provide more protections from and resources for STS.

WEA joined with other school advocates to pass legislation in the 2021 session that requires school districts to recognize secondary traumatic stress and take steps to address it in their staff. Additionally, the [Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction](#) and [Alliance for a Healthier Generation](#) have made resources available online. WEA members statewide are speaking out in the legislative session to win additional protections, plus increase funding for our schools so more mental health supports are available for our students and ourselves.

SOURCE: WEA Website

Schoolwide Secondary Traumatic Stress

A range of warning signs can indicate that your school as a whole may be affected by trauma.

- ✓ School environment is often chaotic, disorganized, and unpredictable.
- ✓ Staff members are often fearful of their own safety.
- ✓ Staff members often use harsh and punitive discipline practices to regain control.
- ✓ The school has a high rate of staff turnover.
- ✓ The school has a high rate of staff absenteeism.
- ✓ There is a lack of communication and/or frequent miscommunication among staff members.
- ✓ Interpersonal conflicts are increasing among staff members in different roles or departments.
- ✓ Work is often incomplete.
- ✓ Work quality is often poor.
- ✓ The school has a negative atmosphere.
- ✓ People at the school feel a lack of emotional and/or physical safety.
- ✓ Staff members have less energy or motivation to go the extra mile.
- ✓ Staff members collectively tend to be cynical and negative about students.
- ✓ Student and family complaints about the school have increased.

Secondary Traumatic Stress

Symptoms and Warning Signs



RELATED CONDITIONS

Professionals affected by secondary traumatic stress and related conditions such as vicarious trauma experience a variety of symptoms that may affect all aspects of daily life, including negative changes in beliefs about themselves, others, and their work.

Avoidance - Coping with stress by shutting down and disconnecting.

Hypervigilance - Excessive alertness for potential threats or dangers at and outside of work.
Always being "on" and "on the lookout".

Poor Boundaries - Lacking a balanced sense of your role so that you take on too much, step in and try to control events, have difficulty leaving work at work, or take the work too personally.

Inability to Empathize/Numbing - Unable to remain emotionally connected to the work.

Chronic Exhaustion/Physical Ailments - Experiencing physical, emotional, and spiritual fatigue or inexplicable aches and pains exceeding what you expect for an ordinary busy day or week.

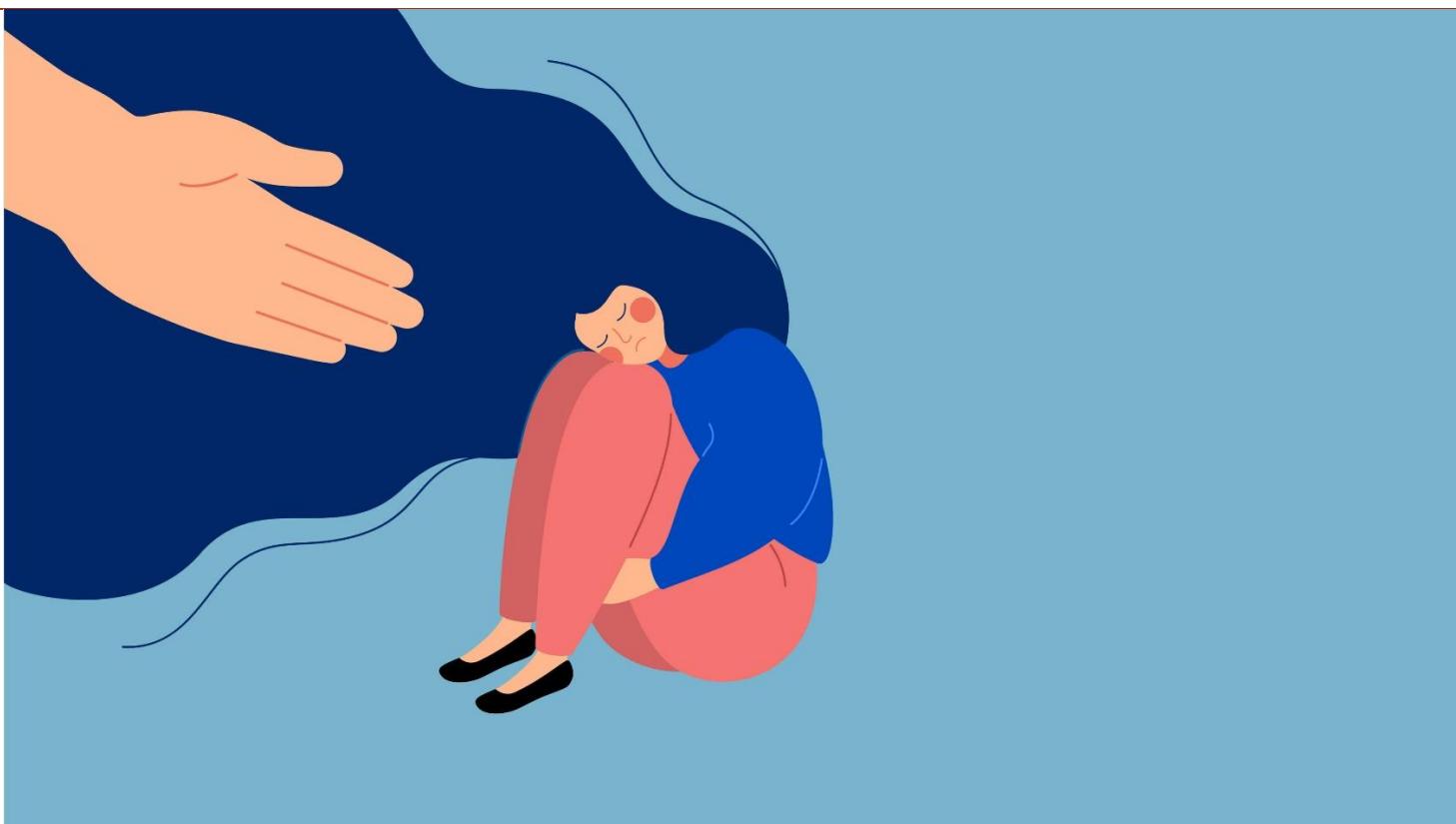
Addictions - Attaching to distractions to check out from work, personal life, or both.

Minimizing - Trivializing a current experience by comparing it with another situation that we regard as more severe.

Anger and Cynicism - Using cynicism or anger to cope with other intense feelings that we may not understand or know how to manage.

Feelings of Professional Inadequacy - Becoming increasingly unsure of yourself professionally, second-guessing yourself, feeling insecure about tasks that you once felt confident to perform.

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Educators, counselors, and other support staff who work with students exposed to trauma are at risk of being indirectly traumatized as a result of hearing about their students' experiences and witnessing the negative effects.

SOURCE: WEA Website

Secondary Traumatic Stress

Symptoms and Warning Signs

- Increased anxiety and concern about safety
- Intrusive, negative thoughts and images related to their students' traumatic stories
- Fatigue and physical complaints
- Feeling numb or detached from students
- Feeling powerless or hopeless about students & work
- Diminished concentration and difficulty with decision making
- Desire to physically or emotionally withdraw from people or situations that trigger difficult thoughts and emotions

Becoming aware of the effects your work has on you is essential to helping you take care of yourself. Think about the warning signs of STS and related conditions. Even if you are not regularly exposed to student trauma, you may be struggling with issues of burnout or remnants of your own personal trauma experience. Many strategies are available to reduce the signs and symptoms of STS and related conditions, including physical, psychological, spiritual, emotional, workplace, and professional support.

SOURCE: Trauma Sensitive Schools



A number of individual and system-level strategies effectively promote staff self-care and resilience.

Tools for Staff Self Care and Resilience

Creating a healthy work environment is a shared process that includes individual and school based strategies. Explore these ideas for what you can do and what your school can do to foster wellness for all.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Increase your knowledge and awareness of the effects of trauma and STS. Assess your current level of burnout, STS, and vicarious trauma. Stay connected to other people and groups that are supportive and nourishing. Identify and incorporate specific self-care strategies for promoting resilience and maintaining a healthy work-life balance (e.g., exercise, good nutrition, supportive networks).

WHAT YOUR DISTRICT CAN DO

Educate staff about the effects of trauma, STS, and related conditions and provide regular opportunities for staff to address potential issues related to STS. Identify and monitor STS and related conditions among staff. Here are two resources that may be helpful:

- [Quality of Life Measure](#)
- [Quality of Life Self Care Tools](#)

Encourage and develop formal strategies for peer support and mentorship. Create a culture that fosters staff resilience that includes fair leave policies, adequate benefits, a physically safe and secure working environment, sufficient supervision, support and resources to do the work, and processes for shared decision making.

SOURCE: Trauma Sensitive Schools

TUMWATER
EDUCATION ASSOCIATION



SmartHealth is an online wellness program that supports your whole person well-being. It is included in your SEBB benefits at no cost to you. Join activities that support all of you, such as managing stress, building resiliency, and adapting to change.

SOURCE: OSPI Website

OSPI Resources and Information

Workforce Secondary Traumatic Stress

Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) is the emotional distress that arises when someone vicariously experiences the traumatic experiences of another individual. Sometimes known as compassion fatigue, the toll of tending to someone's painful experiences can create very real symptoms in caregivers, including teachers.

[Substitute House Bill \(SHB\) 1363](#) and [RCW 28A.300.825](#) acknowledges the significant toll STS has on educators, and subsequently students, and focuses on the adoption of policy and procedures so that districts and schools can take meaningful steps in supporting their staff's health and well-being. By implementing policy through the strategic use of professional learning and a continuous improvement process, districts and schools can reduce staff turnover, increase student outcomes, and model healthy behaviors for the entire school community.

Certificated and classified staff, like many others in helping professions, tend to experience STS at greater rates than those in other professions due to the persistent exposure to and expectation of caretaking for students with emotionally painful experiences. In other words, STS can be an outcome of what is an educator's greatest asset: they care deeply about their students and families. Signs and symptoms of STS vary but when left unaddressed may lead to staff turnover, burnout, adult chronic absenteeism and health issues which negatively impact everyone in the school community.

Through a partnership with the Alliance for a Healthier Generation and a statewide team of experts, we have curated a list of [WA Educators Secondary Traumatic Stress Resources](#) and developed a Washington state-specific assessment to assist districts in the implementation of requirements under state law.

Legislative Requirements

Establish a district-wide workforce mental health committee which is directed to:

- Share STS, stress management, and other mental health resources from OSPI, ESD and SEBB (HCA)
- Share links to STS self-assessment tools and associated resources
- Report to district school board annually on district workforce mental health committee activities
- Conduct regular assessments of district and school level implementation inclusive of input from workforce
- Provide appropriate resources and training
- Adopt, or amend if necessary, policies and procedures that, at a minimum, incorporate all the elements.
- Districts must periodically review their policies and procedures for consistency with updated versions of the model policy and procedure.

SOURCE: OSPI Website