



Developing capacity to promote youth sexual health and well-being.

Scroll down to:

- **Participate** in our professional learning series: Let's Talk About Sex...Education! (for community educators and teachers!)
- **Read** *Secondary Traumatic Stress*
- **Learn more about** the Comprehensive Sexual Health Education Legislation.

Join Us for Let's Talk About Sex...Education!

Join other teachers/educators to hear about new teaching practices and receive updates on current research in the sexual health education field. Upcoming dates and topics will be announced in our next eBlast.

Contact Emily at emerson@cardeaservices.org for more information.

Secondary Traumatic Stress

As teachers and youth development professionals, we often hear young people share personal experiences. These experiences may be shared in class, one to one and through an anonymous question box. Sometimes children and youth share trauma from their past or trauma they are currently experiencing. Most teachers and youth development professionals (YDP) are aware of the workplace protocols that are in place to guide their responses and the resources to share with young people if they need referrals. However, our own reactions to hearing these traumas sometimes are ignored or stuffed inside and can begin to impact our well-being.

Whether we work inside a classroom or within a youth serving organization, often our motivation to work with youth comes from a place of care for their academic,

emotional and physical wellness. And often, we do not realize the impact witnessing trauma has on our own lives. This stress is sometimes referred to as Secondary Traumatic Stress or STS.

[Usable Knowledge](#) identifies common symptoms of STS "...withdrawing from friends and family; feeling unexplainably irritable or angry or numb; inability to focus; blaming others; feeling hopeless or isolated or guilty about not doing enough; struggling to concentrate; being unable to sleep; overeating or not eating enough; and continually and persistently worrying about students, when they're at home and even in their sleep."¹ Usable Knowledge also points out that while many helping professions have professional development or policies and protocols to minimize STS, many classroom teachers are unaware that they, too, are just as at risk for STS as any other helping professional.

What does this have to do with sexual health education? When teaching sexual health, there are times when we may avoid certain topics out of fear of how to respond to child/youth disclosures of abuse, violence, or other trauma. We may have fear that the subject could bring up old trauma we have experienced, thus re-traumatizing ourselves. Or, we may feel too fatigued to hold space for youth to grapple with the feelings that are shared within sexual health lessons. For all these reasons, and many more, we have an obligation to take the necessary steps to engage in self-reflection, self-care and get help if we need it.

By keeping our own well-being in the forefront, we can prevent or interrupt the negative impact of STS. We may hear of self-care approaches like taking a long bath, seeing a movie or treating ourselves to a nice dinner. But more meaningful and more long-term self-care involves self-compassion and empathy, building our resilience and boundaries, and sometimes seeking outside help from a doctor or therapist. Some teachers have found that creating support peer groups, accessing more professional development, and advocating change in work protocols/policies have also helped.

Self-care is a part of the greater whole of social-emotional learning (SEL). [More and more research](#) shows the value of SEL for children/youth and the value of [SEL for teachers](#). When teachers/YDPs practice healthy SEL skills, they model those skills for youth. When teachers/YDPs place a value on their own well-being, children and youth benefit, in fact our entire community benefits.

Action for Educators:

- Learn more about STS, read these articles: [Helping Teachers Manage the Weight of Trauma](#) and [Secondary Traumatic Stress](#)
- Take the [STS training and create an action plan](#)
- [Checkout out resources](#) for your well-being and your students' well-being
- Contact your organization's or district's EAP program or [find a therapist here](#)
- And for more resources, please contact your Cardea consultant.

Comprehensive Sexual Health Education Legislation Update

We are excited to announce that the Governor has signed the [comprehensive sexual health education bill](#). This bill requires all public schools to provide comprehensive sexual health education defined as “recurring instruction in human development and reproduction that is age-appropriate and inclusive of all students.”

What does this mean for Washington school districts and teachers?

The Washington Office of Superintendent has details regarding the requirements of the new legislation, including: K-3 [social emotional learning](#) instruction and grades 4-12 human growth and development, intra and interpersonal skills, healthy relationships, health care and consent instruction. For this and more information, please see the Washington Office of Superintendent [frequently asked questions](#) and a [comparison of the old and new legislative requirements](#).

[WA PREP staff](#) are available to support you in assessing your curriculum for new instructional requirements.

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