Supervisor’s Retention Tool kit

State of Arizona
Department of Economic Security
Division of Children, Youth and Families
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Guide to Users
Staff retention is a complex issue. The Division of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) staff face challenges unique to this line of work. The child welfare profession requires staff to engage with people who are in emotionally and physically traumatizing settings making life-changing decisions and high stress are inevitable. For these reasons, front-line staff need supportive supervisory relationships.

The supervisor is a key person who can provide guidance that comes from a real understanding of the struggles involved in working with children and families during difficult times. For the most part, the supervisor has done the same type of field work, understands the personal investment that it requires and can look at the bigger picture, a view that can be obstructed when the staff person is on the front lines. But just having experienced front-line work and being good at it is not enough to make an effective supervisor.

Supervisors need to be able to help their staff manage the emotional intensity of the work. They need to find ways to individualize their approach and communicate with staff who come from diverse backgrounds with different experiences and a variety of work styles. And they need to make sure that the needs of individual children and families are addressed and paperwork is completed on time. For new or struggling supervisors, having such a wide range of responsibilities can seem daunting.

DCYF staff members and stakeholders involved in the development of this tool kit believe it provides essential tools for the supervisor striving to hone or refresh skills in the core areas of engaging, assessing, developing, supporting, and retaining dedicated case managers.

Making the Most of Your Resources
Much of this retention Tool Kit has been synthesized from a series of workbooks published by Michigan State University School of Social Work. The Staff Retention in Child and Family Service Workbook series is based on a review of research literature in child and family service, human services and business. The Retention Tool kit was developed as a quick guide to the critical points of retention focused supervision. For a more thorough review of retention-focused supervisory skills and exercises to use with staff in individual or group settings, download the workbook series from Mckenzie Consultants and the Michigan State University School of Social Work at:

http://www.socialwork.msu.edu/outreach/childwelfare_curriculum.html
Underlying Principles

*The DCYF supervisor is the most influential person in staff retention.*

A good relationship with the front line supervisor is one of the most important factors in retention in nearly every line of work. This is even more essential in DCYF due to the nature of the work and stressful situations encountered. Managing one’s own feelings and learning effective relationship skills to help others manage their feelings and assumptions are important skills for supervisors to apply. The multiple demands, difficult situations and relationships, can cause stress, burnout and result in “secondary trauma” for DCYF staff.

An effective supervisor will facilitate professional development of his/her staff by consistently modeling effective relationships and strengths-oriented behaviors that help staff grow through their most difficult events. An effective supervisor will pay attention to the personal and professional growth needs of his/her staff and offer recognition, encouragement and support. To do this well, supervisors have to be aware of their own vulnerabilities, while building on their personal style and strengths.

The Benefits of Retention Focused Supervision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To Staff</th>
<th>To Supervisor</th>
<th>To Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase sense of belonging and support</td>
<td>Spend less time recruiting, hiring and training new staff</td>
<td>Stable staff and better track record for recruiting and retaining staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience growth and self-discovery</td>
<td>Experience growth and self-discovery</td>
<td>Meet and improve outcomes for children and families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce feelings of stress and burnout</td>
<td>Experience fewer crises</td>
<td>Improve overall productivity of the agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop new approaches to clients</td>
<td>Develop leadership skills</td>
<td>Improve agency-wide communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve self-confidence</td>
<td>Develop more self-confidence in a leadership role</td>
<td>Increase loyalty to the agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience a new sense of competency in their roles</td>
<td>Increase self-esteem</td>
<td>Increase positive perceptions of the agency in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain impression of agency mission and values in practice</td>
<td>Experience a new sense of competency in their roles</td>
<td>Create a positive retention-focused agency culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience support for professional goal-setting</td>
<td>See staff grow and develop personally and professionally</td>
<td>Maintain a stable workforce to serve children and families</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Supervisors have the greatest influence over staff retention. Therefore, the effective supervisor takes a proactive role in staff retention. The supervisor’s style and relationship with staff is of critical importance in attracting and retaining key talent.*

*What a new staff person experiences within the first year is crucial to retention. An experienced supervisor recognizes that over half of turnover occurs in a staff person’s first year on the job. What a staff person first experiences, especially with their supervisor, will determine whether he/she will stay with the agency and ultimately build a career in child and family service.*
Onboarding Employees with DCYF

Onboarding helps employees feel welcome, quickly adjust to the work environment, build rapport with colleagues, and assimilate into existing field units. Such employees experience a smoother and more predictable transition to the sustainable CPS work force. The employee is more productive, driven by a sense of purpose, and committed to the agency’s mission.

Supervisors who follow the onboarding steps outlined in the following pages will experience greater satisfaction earlier in the process of developing the potential of new employees because the processes outlined in this tool kit will help clarify performance expectations, diminish misunderstanding, and decrease the learning curve. Systematic onboarding achieves the outcome supervisors value most: a high-functioning cohesive team.

Engagement
Engagement, or socialization, establishes a sense of belonging and value. An employee’s first impressions with a supervisor and field unit and will determine whether he or she stays with the agency and builds a career with DCYF. Staff and employees who are welcomed and respected will reflect those themes in their work with clients. Tools of engagement can be both abstract and concrete but always set the tone for the relationship to follow. Rapport building begins here!

Engagement checklist

**Pre-arrival**
- Tell unit staff members about the new employee’s start date.
- Notify building receptionist to expect & welcome new employee.
- Prepare unit staff to welcome new employee.
- Prepare the new employee’s workspace with supplies and equipment to do their job.
- Add employee to directories, email lists, in/out boards.
- Arrange for keys, pass codes, business cards, parking permits, as needed.
- Designate staff members responsible for providing shadowing opportunities.

**Day of arrival**
- Reserve time on your schedule to personally greet new employee.
- Make introductions throughout unit and work site.
- Delegate a team member to perform hospitality functions and familiarize your new employee to the conventions of the office: use of common areas, restrooms, parking, etc.
- Extend lunch invitation and make sure new employee is oriented to conveniences and restaurants in the local area.
- Meet with new employee to discuss values and expectations.
- Review training (formal and on-the-job) strategies and scheduling.
- Initiate shadowing. “go-to” peer support.
- Reserve time for meaningful check-in with new employee at the end of the first day.
- Reserve time to meaningful check-in with the new employee at the end of the first week.

**Introduction Tip:** Ask your new employee how he or she wishes to be addressed in the new workplace. Find out which aspects of the person’s assets and strengths he or she wants highlighted when you make introductions.
Mission and Values Discussion
Beginning on the first day of a new hire’s employment, it is important to link the formal mission and values to the direct service work the employee performs. In addition to providing a copy or link to the mission statement, you may find the following questions helpful in jump starting the dialogue:

- What is it about CPS that attracts you?
- How do you think the mission of CPS reflects your personal and professional values?
- In what ways do you foresee this work challenging your personal values?
- In the past how have you resolved value conflicts of this nature?
- To whom will you turn to discuss specific concerns and questions as you work with assigned families?

DES & DCYF: Mission, Vision, and Values

DCYF is just one division under the “umbrella” of the Arizona Department of Economic Security. The DCYF core goals of permanency, safety and well being for children, youth, and families are in line with the mission, vision, and values of DES. Just as we work in partnership with families, community members, service providers, we rely on the services, expertise, and support of other divisions within DES to better serve our families and communities.

DES & DCYF Mission Statements

The Arizona Department of Economic Security promotes the safety, well-being, and self sufficiency of children, adults, and families. The Division of Children, Youth and Families is a human service organization dedicated to achieving safety, well-being and permanency for children, youth and families through leadership and the provision of quality services in partnership with communities.

Our Vision
Every child, adult, and family in the state of Arizona will be safe and economically secure.

Our Goals
- Strengthen Individuals and Families.
- Increase self-sufficiency.
- Develop the capacity of communities.

Our Values
- Respect – We respect each other, our stakeholders, our customers, and our staff. We recognize their differences and uniqueness – we treat all with equality and professionalism.
- Diversity – We value the diversity of all people and strive to make decisions based on equity and fairness and are committed to eliminating discrimination.
- Collaboration – We recognize that partnerships and teamwork are the core foundation of our business. Our collaboration with policymakers, service providers, community providers, families and other stakeholders enables us to develop programs and services that improve the quality of life for all our citizens.
- Accountability – We hold ourselves personally responsible for our commitment to our clients, partners and coworkers. We say what we mean, mean what we say, and continually strive to improve our services and outcomes.
- Innovation – We engage in visionary and strategic thinking and creative problem-solving, challenge the status quo, invite new ways of doing things and look to multiple and diverse sources for ideas and inspiration.
Meaningful Check-in at the End of the First Week:
Discussion Points

How did the first week compare to your expectations?

With respect to getting oriented to working here, what experience stands out as most helpful from your first week? What did not work as well for you?

What agency values did you observe — in action” this week?

What are your thoughts about whether this job is the right fit for you?

What questions do you have?

Outline the plan for coming weeks —
be sure to reserve time for subsequent weekly and monthly check-in times
Assimilation & Acceleration

Assimilation and acceleration refer to the onboarding processes of acquiring skills to perform in the assigned role at CPS and getting up to speed by learning the core issues, strategies, operational methods and communications strategies that will lead to a rapid successful outcome. The supervisor’s main focus during this phase is to establish a supportive and learning-based supervisory-relationship. This phase lasts from the 2nd week of employment through the first year.

Preparation for the Supervisor

☐ Have you scheduled mandatory formal training?
☐ Do you know what formal training content and assignments your new employee is receiving, when it is scheduled, and how well the employee is integrating it?
☐ Do you know the preferred learning & working style of the new employee?
☐ Are you modeling the professional behavior you wish your new employee to emulate?
☐ Have you set clear expectations with respect to work standards — both those articulated in the performance evaluation system (PASE) and your critical priorities?
☐ Are you providing a physically and emotionally safe environment where your new employee can feel supported and express doubts or concerns?

Topics for meaningful discussion during the assimilation and acceleration phase

☐ Does the new employee feel connected with, and valued by, the workgroup?
☐ How can the new employee make a meaningful contribution and get satisfaction from the work when the administrative burdens are so heavy?
☐ How can the new employee manage a workload and remain effective and positive?
☐ Are the new employee’s strengths and skills a good match for this work?
☐ Does the new employee have realistic goals and objectives for fitting in and gaining competence in the assigned case work?
☐ Does the employee believe clients, colleagues, and supervisors value his or her contribution?
☐ Does the new employee find the work enriching or rewarding?
☐ Does the new employee see themselves as developing a long-term career in CPS?
The Supervisor’s Responsibility for Retaining Staff

The quality of supervision is a determining factor in a staff person’s decision to stay or leave an organization. Employees have identified supervisory support as a motivation to stay despite job stress. Conversely employees cite a lack of supervisory support as a critical factor in their decisions to leave. Why? Because the factors that drive motivation and satisfaction within child welfare are largely within the supervisor’s control.

Examples of ‘motivational factors’

- **Achievement** – There must be a feeling of accomplishment and progress toward a goal.
- **Responsibility and meaningfulness** – The individual must feel connected to his/her work with a feeling of pride and ownership and feel in sync with the agency’s mission and values.
- **Recognition** – Individuals must feel that there is proper acknowledgement for the work and the contribution they make.
- **Opportunity for growth** – Paths must exist for advancement both in personal growth (furthering one’s knowledge and skills) and career growth (advancement opportunities).

In child welfare, a good supervisor who cares about and develops a strong connection with staff, starting from the first day of initial orientation, is in the best position to help them find what they want from their work because they can be:

- **Model and Mentor**: To achieve its mission, child welfare work depends on cultivating safe and healing relationships with children, families and communities. A good supervisor will facilitate professional development of his/her staff by consistently modeling effective relationship behaviors that help staff through their most difficult and/or emotionally charged times and events.

- **Representative of Agency Culture**: Most child welfare agencies are organized so that supervisors oversee management of workloads, monitor legal and service requirements and motivate their staff day-to-day. The supervisor represents the agency’s culture by exemplifying how the agency respects and values staff and families.

- **Career Facilitator or Gatekeeper**: Supervisors dispense what tangible retention benefits the agency has to offer as well as the “softer” benefits, including respect, flexibility and encouragement.

The supervisor’s style and relationship with his/her staff is of standout importance in attracting and retaining key talent. This means that the effective supervisor cannot abdicate responsibility but must take a proactive role in staff retention.

Why Workers Stay

People stay in DCYF for reasons that are distinctive to child welfare professionals. These have to do with personal characteristics, support for handling stress, burnout and secondary trauma and effective supervisory and peer relationships. Those prime factors are listed and further expanded on as follows:

**Personal Characteristics**:

- Sense of personal mission – human caring
- Strong feeling of effectiveness in making a difference with children and families
- Goodness of fit with DCYF work and the agency’s mission
- Relevant education and length of time in the field
• Feeling of belonging and personal pride in the agency and its mission

**Supervisory Relationships:**
• Support from and a good relationship with an effective supervisor
• Supervisor who focuses on professional learning, career and personal development
• Recognition and encouragement from the supervisor and agency

**Professional Organizational Culture:**
• Opportunities to learn and develop
• Safe work environment – physically and emotionally
• Concern for employee’s families and personal needs
• Agency investment in staff development
• Support for handling stress, burnout and secondary trauma
• Supportive and satisfying relationships with peers
• Respect from management
• Flexibility in work hours, work setting and dress code

To retain competent, valuable staff and ensure their job satisfaction and loyalty, a resourceful supervisor will make every effort to take advantage of opportunities in which these factors can be represented and manifested within their scope of supervision.
Five Functions of Retention-Focused Supervision

Staff turnover compromises the ability of supervisors to do the job they were hired to do.

Retention-focused supervision is an intentional relationship that gives equal priority to the personal and professional growth of the individual staff person and achieving effective and timely outcomes for children and families. It requires supervisors to be proactive in using mentoring, coaching and consulting skills, while individualizing their approach to diverse personalities and levels of experience.

At the core of this approach is the expectation that supervisors model the attitudes and skills that staff need to be effective with children and families. In working with individual staff, there are five functions of retention focused supervision:

1. **Supporting the professional development of staff**: The retention-focused supervisor is committed to each staff person’s learning and growth and views retention as a personal responsibility. There is a focus on building a professional development partnership with staff that aims to help them become increasingly self-aware and effective in working with others. Supervisory sessions or individual conferences are high priority and are adhered to consistently. Supervisory time is intentionally managed and valued as a series of opportunities to learn and grow.

2. **Individualizing supervision to diverse personalities and circumstances**: Retention-focused supervisors are students of difference. They first understand their own preferred learning and behavioral styles and then individualize their approach to work with staff who may have different perspectives, strengths and approaches that work for them. Tailoring supervisory skills to build and draw on an individual employee’s strengths is the ‘art’ of retention-focused supervision.

3. **Utilizing effective communication and other skills**: Retention-focused supervisors are able to communicate with all staff, including those that have different styles from their own. Communication skills that foster respect, empathy and encouragement are very important. The ability to listen effectively, give constructive feedback, use open questions for debriefing staff and employing empathy are required skills for retention-focused supervisors. Modeling these skills will help staff work through challenging situations with children and families, as well as those that arise within the agency.

4. **Building a positive agency culture**: Retention-focused supervisors have a particular role in building and reinforcing a positive culture within the agency. In a sense, supervisors are the agency’s cultural ambassadors. They are in the best position to model respectful behaviors and encourage a safe, caring learning environment.

5. **Facilitating and teaching staff to achieve effective and timely outcomes**: DCYF supervisors understand that their staff want and need to be effective to continue their commitment to the profession. They assist and support staff to do the work necessary to achieve timely outcomes for children and families. They work with their staff around building relationships and performing the necessary tasks to provide safety, well being and permanency for children and families.

Assessing Your Supervisory Competencies

One of the first steps to improving retention skills is for the supervisor to take a look at what he/she does well and what areas need attention. The activity that follows incorporates five functions of staff retention discussed in previous sections into an easy to complete self-assessment.
Supervisor’s Staff Retention Competencies Inventory

A) Read each statement and score yourself on the extent/frequency to which you do each of these behaviors. Use the following rating scale:

1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neither agree nor disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Development: I support the personal and career growth of my staff. If asked, my staff would say that I…</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Take personal responsibility for retaining my staff.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Give priority to maintaining a schedule of regular, focused supervisory meetings.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Care about their values and help them connect their values with the agency’s mission.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Work to build partnerships between myself and my staff.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Help staff cultivate and use self-awareness in their work with families, children and others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Help staff set objectives for cases and personal development.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Encourage appropriate autonomy and decision making, based on an individual’s experience and competence.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Support accountability and achieving outcomes for children and families by removing barriers and advocating for resources.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Help staff take responsibility for their own learning and development.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Encourage staff to take part in growth opportunities within the agency and professional education.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Model the type of relationship that staff need to develop in their work with children and families.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Link staff with others who can encourage their growth and job satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total score Professional Development
1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neither agree nor disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working with Differences: I respect and build on each individual's strengths and what makes each of them unique. If asked, my staff would say that I…</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13. Model respect for differences and diversity.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Understand my assumptions about individual staff and work to value his/her unique differences.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Treat staff respectfully and preserve their dignity.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Understand how my personal learning style impacts my interaction with staff.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Understand staff’s learning styles and employ techniques that are designed to aid in their learning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Understand how my behavioral style impacts my interaction with staff.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Understand my staff’s behavioral style and maintain flexibility in working with staff whose styles differ from my own.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Understand and manage my emotions and those of staff.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Total score Working with Differences**
1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neither agree nor disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Skills: I model the relationship and communication skills that I want my staff to emulate with their clients. If asked, my staff would say that I…</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21. Tailor my communication based on who I am, who my staff are and what the situation requires.</td>
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<tr>
<td>22. Listen carefully to what is being communicated and summarize what I hear.</td>
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<tr>
<td>23. Ask questions that draw out additional information</td>
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<tr>
<td>24. Look for and evaluate nonverbal cues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>25. Identify and work with the feelings behind the words.</td>
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<tr>
<td>26. Keep an open mind and ask open questions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>27. Tell the truth and give thoughtful feedback that focuses on actions and not attitude.</td>
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<tr>
<td>28. Give feedback that works to instruct and assist staff rather than alienate them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>29. Ask clarifying questions to better understand staff emotions, attitudes and behaviors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>30. Challenge staff to rethink their blind spots, assumptions and values.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total score Communication Skills
1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neither agree nor disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture and Environment: I understand that supervisors are cultural ambassadors for the agency. If asked, staff would say that I…</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31. Place a high priority on staff retention and make it part of everyone’s responsibility.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Maintain physical and emotional safety in the workplace and have safety policies and plans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>33. Develop and engage a multi-cultural workforce at all levels of the agency.</td>
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<tr>
<td>34. Care deeply about staff and their families and encourage balance between work, personal life and having fun in the workplace.</td>
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<tr>
<td>35. Support and encourage staff for their commitment and work on behalf of families and children and celebrate accomplishments.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Give staff appropriate autonomy to work in their own creative ways.</td>
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<tr>
<td>37. Promote a culture of continuous learning and development.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total score Culture and Environment**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance and Outcomes: I want my staff to be successful on the job and earn the respect of others. If asked, my staff would say that I…</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>38. Teach and reinforce policies, procedures, and protocols relevant to the job.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>39. Model and teach how to effectively manage the workload.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>40. Help staff make difficult decisions and set priorities.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. Teach child and family assessment skills.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>42. Teach report writing skills.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. Teach how to access and use community resources.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. Find ways for staff to do more of what they love to do.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45. Look for innovative and customized ways to reward and recognize talented people.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46. Differentially assign work to the staff who are most passionate about it.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>47. Give credit and spotlight to staff.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>48. Give continuous feedback on individual staff performance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>49. Conduct affirming and timely performance reviews.</td>
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<tr>
<td>50. Find creative ways to encourage teamwork to manage workloads.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Total score Performance and Outcomes**
B) Summarize your scores

1. Circle the number on the chart shown below that best approximates how you scored in each category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Supporting Staff Development</th>
<th>Working with Difference</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Building Positive Culture</th>
<th>Support Performance and Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strongly Agree</strong></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>54</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agree</strong></td>
<td>48</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>52</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>Neither agree nor disagree</strong></td>
<td>36</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disagree</strong></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strongly Disagree</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Now draw a line through each of the five circles connecting them on the chart. How do your scores compare? Are they in balance or are some higher and some lower?

2. Look over your assessment scores and decide if there are any line items that you feel are especially significant. Circle those that you think are most important and want/need to work on.
# Things I Will Do To Improve My Retention Competencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The skills I want to improve</th>
<th>What I can do by next week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. My first step will be to…

2. I will ask for help from __________________ to do…

3. I will know that I am making progress by…

4. I will reward myself by…
Responding to Diversity

The ability to work with diverse populations and to appreciate individual differences is key to retaining committed staff. The agency seeks to respond to the children and families of Arizona with a diverse, representative staff.

Issues that arise due to staff differences can be obvious or subtle. Supervisors who do not address issues arising from such differences will find those issues leaking into services to clients with potentially destructive results.

Ongoing attention to themes of diversity will help staff gain unity in the workplace. Staff will also develop better understanding of how best to partner with colleagues and clients alike.

Dimensions of diversity
The phrase “diversity in the workplace” may bring to mind a narrow descriptor. A myriad of factors impact diverging (isolating) and converging (affiliating) world views, including:

- Age
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Geography
- Socioeconomics
- Language
- Sexual orientation
- Spirituality
- Marital/parenting status
- Educational background
- Politics
- Life experience
- Workload
- Status in the workplace
- Relational style

Most supervisors have a natural way working with their staff. The supervisor’s own style may be very effective, but he or she may be challenged by certain individuals who express or represent a different world view. Working with these differences requires self-awareness, flexibility and a broad range of responses to ever-changing situations and people.

Self Assessment Points to Ponder

☑️ I understand my assumptions about individual staff and work to value unique differences.
☑️ I treat staff respectfully.
☑️ I understand my personal learning style preferences and take care not to presume my staff members have the same preferences.
☑️ I understand my staff’s learning styles and consider those when I am developing techniques to aid their learning.
☑️ I understand my behavioral style and how it impacts my staff.
☑️ I understand my staff’s behavioral style and how those may differ from my own.
☑️ I understand and manage my emotion and my reactions to the emotions of my staff.
Professional Development of Staff

The work of child welfare is too stressful and too demanding to be carried alone. Staff are involved in complex interactions with children and families; interactions that they can only share with a supervisor who makes them feel safe and valued for the work they are doing.

The retention-focused supervisor understands this and forms a partnership with the staff person, utilizing trust and collaboration. Through this partnership, staff feel there is a shared responsibility with the supervisor that helps to reduce feelings of isolation and stress. The message to the staff person is that the time spent with him/her is important and valuable to the work that is being done with children and families.

Child welfare workers rely on the supervisor’s intentional use of self to successfully support the professional development of staff.

Do I Support Professional Development By…

☑ Taking personal responsibility for retaining my staff?
☑ Giving priority to maintaining a schedule of regular, focused supervisory meetings?
☑ Caring about the values of staff and helping them connect their values with the agency’s mission?
☑ Working to build partnerships between myself and my staff?
☑ Helping staff cultivate and use self-awareness in their work with families, children and others?
☑ Helping staff set objectives for cases and personal development?
☑ Encouraging appropriate autonomy and decision making, based on an individual’s experience and competence?
☑ Supporting accountability and achieving outcomes for children and families by removing barriers and advocating for resources?
☑ Encouraging staff to take part in growth opportunities within the agency and professional education?
☑ Modeling with staff the type of relationship they need to develop in their work with children and families?
☑ Linking staff with others who can encourage their growth and job satisfaction?
A Supervisor’s Focus

Effective supervisors gauge where each individual staff is related to experience, stress and risk and vary their style accordingly. Variations in style and level of intensity are described below.

**Orienting/Teaching** – When staff are new to the job or have limited experience, supervisors need to be more involved through orienting, training, providing structure, directions and teaching. During this stage the new employee is trying to master information, requirements and routines.

**Directing** – When a staff person is inexperienced and there is a high-risk or critical function to be performed, the supervisor is likely to be more directive and structured in his/her approach. During these situations, the staff person is likely to need someone to accompany him/her into the field or walk them through procedures step by step.

**Coaching/Mentoring** – As staff mature on the job they require less oversight, with the supervisor acting more as a mentor or coach. The supervisor provides information and tips as needed, but usually uses clarifying questions to enhance the staff person’s problem-solving skills and increase autonomy. The focus is on employee growth and development.

**Consulting/Collaborating** – When in crisis, more experienced staff will usually require a partnering, consulting or collaborating relationship. The focus in this relationship is to add agency endorsement to legitimate decisions and actions and share responsibility for difficult decisions. In very high-risk situations, the supervisor or a higher-level staff person may need to make a decision upon consultation with the staff person.

**Monitoring** – A necessary part of working with all staff is monitoring. With inexperienced staff, most cases will be monitored for compliance. As staff gain more experience, cases will be randomly selected for performance monitoring at periodic intervals.

Over time, the effective supervisory relationship will naturally evolve from a relationship that concerns itself with teaching and acting as a role model for the staff person, to a consultative and mutually growth enhancing partnership.

**The Importance of Mutual Trust and Respect**

Being trustworthy, communicating a consistent message that is aligned with the organization’s mission and purpose, and treating staff with respect are core features of a supervisory style that works to retain staff. Supervisors build trust by:

- Giving priority to maintaining a regular schedule of supervisory sessions with staff
- Doing what they say they will do
- Finding necessary resources and breaking down barriers so work can get done
- Creating an environment where staff feel physically and emotionally safe
- Showing care and concern for individual s and their families
- Maintaining confidentiality
- Being respectful and discreet in work with staff – what happens in supervision stays in supervision
- Being sincerely interested in and open to the needs of staff and the children and families they serve
Increasing Effectiveness of the Supervisory Process

Professional supervision takes place every day in planned and informal encounters with staff, in groups and in individual settings. Though the supervisor may have a very strong and natural supervisory style, by becoming more self-aware and intentional in work with staff, he/she can enhance personal effectiveness. This section details the major types of supervisory meetings and encounters, and provides suggestions and tools for supervisors to use.

One-on-One Sessions
Scheduled supervisory meetings need to be planned and focused in order to be productive. This is an opportunity to meet with staff one-on-one and/or in supervisory groups to support and assist them in meeting agency and professional goals. The platform for these sessions is usually the individual staff person’s performance objectives, caseload and other assignments. Conversations are about solving problems; accessing internal and external resources; removing barriers to achieving outcomes and/or getting paperwork done; encountering conflicted relationships with specific clients, other staff members, or external agencies; and facing personal struggles or issues that may impact the individual’s performance.

Planning and Structuring Productive Supervisory Meetings

Before the meeting
- Develop a regular schedule of meetings with each staff person and strictly adhere to the time scheduled for the meeting.
- Create a comfortable and confidential environment for holding meetings.
- Resist any unnecessary interruptions including cleaning off your desk or table.

Prepare for the meeting
- Review the objectives you and your staff person established related to his/her performance.
- Reflect on your last meeting with the staff person. What action items were established?
- Did you follow through on actions you promised to do?
- Review case materials and cases that are to be discussed.
- Reflect on the staff person’s unique strengths and style.
- Reflect on recurring themes from previous meetings, identifying where the staff person might be stuck and need your help to progress.
- Consider what meeting outcomes would benefit the agency, the staff person and you.
- Be aware of your own work style, your current state of mind and emotions.

During the meeting
- Be personable, even if it is not your customary style. Pay attention to what the staff person may bring to the session including stress level, emotional state and readiness to tackle difficult issues.
- Ask the staff person what would be a good outcome for him/her as a result of this meeting; share the outcomes you are seeking.
- Begin the meeting by developing an agenda for the meeting with the staff person.
- If you prepared the agenda in advance, be sure to engage the staff person in making changes, as necessary.
Follow the agenda as appropriate, but stay flexible to address crises or important professional development issues that may come up.

- Use listening, clarifying questions, reflection, empathy, encouragement and other communication skills to engage and empower staff and to gain necessary information and give feedback.
- Support staff in making difficult case decisions.
- Challenge staff by exploring potential blind spots and recurring themes, including relationship issues with you or others, as appropriate.
- Provide feedback on case reviews, outcomes and agency requirements.
- Review action items from last meeting.
- Develop mutually agreed upon action items.
- Plan the agenda and schedule next meeting.

After the meeting

- Follow through on your assignments
- Give feedback to staff on progress, information and resources as needed

It is important to understand that a supervisor can spend time planning scheduled meetings and conducting these well; but, in the heat of the moment, can destroy a supervisory relationship by acting rude, abrasive, by being disrespectful to a staff person or by violating his/her personal boundaries or trust. No one is perfect or “on” all of the time, especially under stress. When uncomfortable or inappropriate situations do occur, it is best for the supervisor to acknowledge and initiate a discussion about what happened and apologize when appropriate. Humility goes a long way in restoring confidence in a relationship that has been injured. Some tips for handling unscheduled supervisory encounters follow:

Impromptu Meetings

- Clarify in advance the type of situations that are considered to be crises and how staff need to involve their supervisor when such situations arise
- Follow agency policy and protocol in crises and/or high-risk situations
- Remember, staff who are managing a crisis case will need the supervisor to be accessible in person and/or by telephone and feel comfortable in approaching him/her anytime – day or night

Staff or Workgroup Meetings

- Develop and follow a meeting agenda and schedule.
- Use meeting time productively, respecting how important time is to staff.
- Establish and reinforce “rules of engagement” for meetings to be followed by staff and supervisors alike.
- Honor each individual’s confidentiality in meetings.
- Model dignity and respect for all staff and their ideas in meetings.
- Utilize and model effective communication and group process skills.
- Honor diversity and individual style differences.
- Champion ideas, not individuals.
- Whenever possible, discuss disruptive individual staff behaviors outside of the meeting and in private.
Reviewing and Giving Feedback on Case Materials Submitted by Staff

- Try to give feedback in person.
- Give positive, specific feedback whenever warranted; don’t underestimate the value of positive recognition and encouragement.
- Balance feedback by focusing on strengths first and then dealing with areas for improvement.
- Help staff link requested change to personal career goals.
- Give precise, detailed examples of information needing change.
- Give reasons for asking for or suggesting the change.
- Help staff figure out how to make the needed changes.
- Help remove obstacles to getting the work done in a timely way.
- Acknowledge and celebrate progress.

Informal discussions/encounters

- Pass on information that staff need to know in between meetings (if the information seriously impacts their job, it is best to do this in private).
- Be friendly and upbeat.
- Show genuine caring for the individual and his/her family.
- Use humor and encourage fun, as appropriate.

Memos, Notes and Email

- Email does not substitute for face to face communication.
- Opt to communicate in person when practical.
- Address staff appropriately; use please and thank you.
- Use a positive tone in written communication to staff; try to come across as friendly, respectful and approachable.
- Be professional; don’t use derogatory comments.
- Avoid giving performance feedback in emails.
- Give positive feedback and encouragement.
- When answering emails, resist “copying all” unless absolutely necessary.
- Re-read the written piece before sending it; screen it for potential misunderstandings or innuendos.
- Avoid using all capitals or huge print — it may seem like shouting.
- Avoid using all lower case or lack of punctuation — it may seem like a monotone

Content and Focus of Supervision

The content of supervision includes cases, projects and special assignments given to staff. An important role of supervisors is to assure that children and families served by the agency are receiving required and effective services. Cases are reviewed and discussed for several reasons:

- To monitor the quality and effectiveness of the services being provided to families
- To help staff use agency and professional processes in assessing and working with families and children (technical or hard skills)
- To help staff become increasingly more professional and effective in their day-to-day work with children and families (professionalism and relationship skills or soft skills)
The supervisor needs to be both proactive in scheduling cases for review and discussion and be responsive to case situations that staff may be struggling with and bring to their attention; particularly, where there are patterns developing that need the supervisor’s involvement.

Monitoring

The focus of case reviews is to monitor compliance with certain performance factors and outcome measures. For example: Are the required number of staff home visits or sessions being accomplished? Are children visiting with siblings and parents? Is the required paper work completed on time? Are cases progressing to meet required outcomes and timelines? Are regular reports filed on time? Is the staff person attending court, working with parents, showing up for appointments and meetings?

Supporting Agency and Professional Processes

Using cases, the supervisor can assist staff to use agency and professional standards and protocols to achieve case goals and outcomes. For example:

- Are agency policies and district operational procedures being followed?
- Are documents and reports communicating appropriate assessment and case management skills?
- Is the staff person being strengths-oriented in his/her approach?
- Is there sufficient progress being made in cases?
- Is the quality of case plans and reports sufficient?

Enhancing Professional Development

An important purpose of supervision is to support the professional development and autonomy of each staff person. This means that both the supervisor and staff are engaged in an ongoing process of continuously improving self-awareness and self-mastery.

Through case discussions and case reviews, the supervisor develops an understanding of how staff’s values and life experiences can influence their ability to work with certain clients. Does the staff person have effective working relationships with children and families, other agencies, peers, resource parents, and others necessary to do good work? Does the staff person demonstrate sufficient maturity to do the job they are assigned to do? Does the staff person demonstrate cultural competency?

In some instances, the client’s behavior or situation may bring out unresolved family or personality conflicts. Values and personal conflicts can affect a worker’s objectivity and performance. It is the supervisor’s responsibility to help their staff identify and work through conflicts that affect their ability to stay centered on the best interests of clients. Conflicts may be manifested in the staff person’s difficulties in working with certain personalities; over-identifying with the neglect or abuse of a child or adult; having difficulty in working with racial, cultural or social class differences; or establishing inappropriate boundaries with clients. Using techniques, such as listening and clarifying questions, can be very effective in helping staff put such potential conflicts in perspective.

Outcomes and Accountability

Setting goals and meeting outcomes are important parts of developing and maintaining a high morale and culture for retention. Accountability is everybody’s business. Accountability is an important concept for supervisors to model and reinforce.

From the supervisor’s perspective, accountability is about meeting and adhering to the standards of ethics of the profession; providing quality services; and achieving timely case outcomes. Supervisors need to
take personal responsibility for the work performed by their staff. This means setting clear expectations and monitoring the achievements of their staff. People don't perform well when expectations are low.

Some of the most critical human needs that affect staff commitment and performance are:

- Pride in one’s work and employer
- Work that has meaning — staff want to be part of something, to “do good” and accomplish goals
- Clear goals and understanding of one’s role in accomplishing goals
- A voice in shaping how the work is to be done
- Professional autonomy appropriate to one’s experience and education
- Acknowledgement and recognition for individual and team achievements

In recent years, there has been more emphasis on achieving timely outcomes in child and family services (Child and Family Services Review). How an agency administers outcome requirements is critical to success. Agencies that are autocratic and demeaning to staff who do not or cannot reach outcomes because of lack of resources will have difficulty retaining staff.

Following are some key points for supervisors to consider when seeking better and timelier outcomes for children and families. Supervisors need to:

- “Buy in” to agency commitments and contractor requirements pertaining to outcomes for children and/or families
- Make sure that their staff know what the expected outcomes are and acceptable timeframes for achieving them in their program
- Advocate for and provide staff with adequate resources to achieve outcomes
- Improve processes to reduce barriers, redundancy and wasted time in achieving outcomes
- Put processes in place to support, improve and measure individual and team performance
- Learn how to use the latest technologies to communicate with staff and monitor outcomes; e.g. collecting and analyzing data to guide decision making, make work assignments, set priorities and monitor achievements.
Managing the Impact of Stress and Burnout

There are times when even experienced staff may need more active involvement from their supervisor. This may include times when staff are under a great deal of stress, injury or death of a client has occurred or when situations present a high level of risk for staff, the agency and/or the families and children served.

Having an understanding of the impact of stress on staff is important for retention-focused supervisors working to build positive relationships with staff. Everyone has his/her own window of tolerance in which they can accept and cope with stress. Most people are fine as long as they can keep stress in their window of tolerance. It is important to remember that in times of stress, thinking processes may become confused and distorted and stress may suppress short-term memory.

Everyone is susceptible to the impact of stress and supervisors who are concerned about the emotional health of their staff need to be aware of ways to help staff recognize when too much stress turns into distress and help them manage it. The following table describes four categories of stress:

### Four Categories of Stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survival Stress</th>
<th>Internally Generated Stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occurs:</td>
<td>Can come from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>anxious worrying about events beyond one’s control,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a tense and hurried approach to life or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>relationship problems caused by one’s behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some people generate internal stress as an addiction or for enjoyment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environmental and Job Stress</th>
<th>Fatigue and Overwork</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stress caused by one’s living or working environment. Causes of stress include:</td>
<td>This type of stress builds up over long time periods. It can occur when one tries to achieve too much in too little time without effective time management strategies or when there is prolonged overwork.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- noise,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- pollution,</td>
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<tr>
<td>- dirt or other distractions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events from work can also cause stress.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Stress vs. Distress

As illustrated in the *Four Categories of Stress* table, there are multiple sources for the stress people encounter. Child and family service staff, by the very nature of the jobs they do, are exposed to high levels of job stress.

All stress is not bad. To _stress_ something is to put emphasis on it, or add pressure, force and/or strain. This can be a good thing when it is under control such as doing a reasonable amount of physical exercise, stepping up to a new mental challenge, taking on an interesting new project or cleaning out the closet. But these things do not happen in a vacuum. There is often so much going on at work and in the personal lives of staff and supervisors that sometimes a small bit of added stress results in extreme feelings or overreaction. Distress is when people are faced with too much stress, resulting in negative consequences.
Excessive stress can have a negative impact on how a person functions and her/his relationships with others at work and at home. In child and family service, it is not unusual for supervisors and managers to ignore their own needs for time off and other stress relievers. Nobody wins when that happens.

**How Distress Can Affect Performance**

- Clouds judgment
- Disrupts ability to concentrate
- Reduces fine motor control
- Turns challenges into threats
- Damages self-confidence
- Reduces enjoyment of work
- Promotes negative thinking
- Narrows attention span
- Interferes with the quality of work
- Effects quality of decision making

Distress that is not dealt with can lead to burnout and/or compassion fatigue. Staff who experience these conditions often leave the agency or the field. Supervisors cannot control the stressors outside of the work environment, but they can be aware of them while focusing on lessening the level of distress on the job.

Burnout is a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion caused by long term involvement in emotionally demanding situations. Some literature also refers to this condition as “compassion fatigue,” especially when applied to people who are in care-giving roles over a period of time. Burnout occurs when highly committed people lose interest and motivation. Typically, it occurs in hard working, driven people who become emotionally, psychologically or physically exhausted. Often burnout will manifest itself in a reduction in motivation, volume and quality of performance, or in dissatisfaction with or departure from the activity altogether.

Burnout and/or compassion fatigue are processes rather than a fixed condition and are characterized by:

- An erosion of idealism
- A void of achievement
- Emotional exhaustion

Staff who are at risk for burnout or compassion fatigue include those who:

- Find it difficult to say ‘no’ to additional commitments or responsibilities
- Experience intense and sustained pressure for prolonged periods of time
- Have high standards that make it difficult to delegate to others
- Try to achieve too much for too long
- Give too much emotional support for too long
- Experience a lack of control over commitments
- Believe incorrectly that they are accomplishing less
- Have a growing tendency to think negatively
- Experience a loss of a sense of purpose and energy
- Have an increasing detachment from relationships

Helping staff avoid burnout and compassion fatigue is a job that retention-focused supervisors will want to undertake. Supervisors need to avoid the lure of depending too heavily on the most competent staff by assigning them the most complicated cases. Respecting the limits of their mental energy is vital to helping them to preserve themselves. Knowing staff well enough to allow them to say no to commitments that they don’t feel they can take on is also a skill of retention-focused supervisors. This includes helping staff guard against committing too much of their time to any one project.
It is the role of the retention-focused supervisor to assist staff who are under a great deal of stress and/or in danger of burning-out by helping them to:

- Re-evaluate their goals and prioritize them
- Evaluate the demands placed on them, their ability to comfortably meet these demands and to determine how they fit with their goals
- Reduce commitments that are excessive
- Become less approachable and less sympathetic with people who demand too much emotional energy from them
- Involve others in a supportive role to help them deal with those who demand too much
- Learn stress management skills such as stress reducing activities
- Examine other areas in their life that are generating stress
- Utilize support of their friends and family
- Acknowledge that they have a right to pleasure and a right to relaxation

**Post Traumatic Stress Disorders and Secondary Trauma**

Post traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) involve the development of characteristic symptoms following a psychologically traumatic event. These symptoms may include:

- Recurrent and intrusive recollections of the trauma
- Avoidance of stimuli associated with the traumatic event or numbering of general responsiveness
- Persistent symptoms of increased arousal

PTSD is usually the result of direct exposure to a traumatic event. Examples may include: physical assault, vandalism to property, verbal threats, stalking, child removal, witnessing physical assaults upon others.

Secondary trauma (which is also referred to in the literature as compassion fatigue, compassion stress, vicarious trauma or burnout) can occur as a result of a single event and is usually an “indirect” exposure to a traumatic event. This could include a child’s death on one’s caseload, serious injuries to children, rapes, physical abuse, extreme neglect, criticism by the press, and threat of lawsuits. Secondary trauma is an element or contributing factor to burnout and many of the symptoms are the same as burnout symptoms. DCYF staff are particularly vulnerable to secondary trauma because they are usually empathic, may have unresolved issues related to previous trauma, have insufficient recovery time and often their work involves children who experience extreme abuse and trauma. It is, therefore, very important that the agency understand the potential impact of secondary trauma on staff and be proactive in addressing situations. Some organizational responses can include:

- Develop and support a supervisory model that encourages staff to share difficult experiences, problem-solve and learn from them.
- Encourage the use of grief counseling and peer support when traumatic events occur.
- De-brief traumatic events and focus on lessons learned and future prevention.
- Discourage excessive over time and habits of not taking sufficient time off.
- Nurture the sense of mission, purpose and meaning that is part of the helping role, since it is a crucial ingredient to the psychological well-being of the helper.
Implications for Child and Family Services Supervisors

In summary, DCYF supervisors must “own” retention to be successful. Some practical ways for supervisors to demonstrate their commitment to retention include:

- Take charge of a new staff person’s orientation, ensuring that staff are brought into an inclusive team and receive proper orientation to the work
- Assist staff to navigate the agency’s infrastructure
- Connect staff with peers and others who can support them and encourage their growth
- Exemplify caring and respect for staff at all times
- Help staff connect with the agency’s mission and beliefs and manage the emotional intensity and stress of the work
- Build an evolving “professional development partnership” with each staff person, tailored to the individual’s strengths, capacity and unique needs
- Plan and advocate for staff to have appropriate educational and training opportunities that are internal and external to the agency
- Support staff in identifying, balancing, and meeting their personal and professional goals