Introduction	The Department of Children and Families recognizes that child welfare workers and interdisciplinary professionals at all levels of the agency shall inevitably encounter hardship, pain and traumatic dangerous events directly or indirectly. It has become increasingly apparent that the psychological effects of exposure to trauma and violence extend beyond those directly affected. Secondary traumatic stress is becoming viewed as an occupational hazard that can result from providing direct services to traumatized populations (Bride, NASW, 2007; *Children's Voice*, Child Welfare League of America, March/April, 2009; Schultz, 2009, *Common Ground*).

Preventing and limiting the harmful effects of primary and secondary traumatic stress requires an organizational culture of safety, trust, team support and an understanding of the impact of trauma on DCF staff.

The following best practice guidelines reflect the Department's policy on Worker Support Teams. These guidelines shall be implemented in all DCF Area Offices, Facilities, Regions and at Careline and Central Office.

Measures to Minimize Risk	Area Office Directors, Regional Administrators and Superintendents are responsible for developing protocols, procedures and training to minimize risk and assure the safety and support of DCF employees when confronted directly or indirectly by traumatic or dangerous events. These measures include, but are not limited to, the following:

- crisis intervention and critical incident debriefing in the aftermath of a fatality or other significant incident (individual crisis counseling, group debriefing, post-incident referral);
- clear protocols, procedures and training for supervisors, administrators and members of local Worker Support and Wellness Teams;
- maintaining open communication and coordinating responses within Area Offices, Facilities and Regions with Central Office;
- referrals to the Employee Assistance Program, Human Resources and other relevant resources;
- routine emphasis on preventive operations in local Area Offices, Facilities, Regions and at Careline, including:
    - (a) psycho-education and debriefing;
    - (b) preparedness and estimations of exposure;
    - (c) planning and development of clear protocols for responding to crises;
    - (d) staff support, consultation and technical assistance; and
    - (e) health and wellness activities;
- inclusion of information and technical assistance related to primary and secondary traumatic stress within the DCF Academy for Family and Workforce Knowledge and Development, to be coordinated with the Worker Support and Wellness Community of Practice and local Worker Support and Wellness Teams.

Local Worker Support and Wellness Teams shall meet regularly, summarize meetings, distribute summaries to all staff and have adequate representation across disciplines and job classes. Worker Support and Wellness Teams shall appoint co-chairs to organize and run the meetings.

Measures to Minimize Risk (Continued)	In addition to responding to crises, local Worker Support and Wellness Teams shall seek to improve the quality of the work environment and culture by developing a range of wellness and health activities, worker appreciation events, linkages with Diversity Action Teams, and coordination with resources that enhance team cohesion and support.

Ongoing Health and Wellness Activities	Witnessing that hardship, pain and trauma in others can impact staff. Recognizing we must take care of ourselves to best take care of others, Worker Support and Wellness teams will focus on health and wellness activities for staff. These activities might include:

- Physical Health and Fitness: Activities that are aimed at improving physical health and fitness such as fitness and exercise classes, yoga, tai chi, nutrition and healthy eating, women/men/family health issues, health screening and wellness assessments, weight management and weight loss activities, and health coaching.
- Mental Health and Stress Management: Physical and psychological techniques as well as psycho-education that are designed to enable the workforce to cope more effectively with professional stress such as: relaxation management techniques, mindfulness-based stress reduction techniques, resiliency education and meditation.
- Personal Growth and Development: Activities that improve self-awareness, self-knowledge and develop strengths and talents at a group level (Area Office or Facility) such as training and development programs, assessment programs, personal development tools, coaching and mentoring.
- Environmental Enhancements: Activities to improve the physical environment and emotional atmosphere at the work site such as art work, musical events, and group festivities.
- Morale Building: Activities that booster office morale, build effective teams, celebrate and acknowledge personal and professional accomplishments, honor people or holidays, and construct a culture of support and hope.

Employees may participate in health and wellness activities only during breaks, meal periods or outside of regular working hours.