

# Autism Initiative: Training Series

## ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Chapter 2.1: Part 1 – Key Components of Stress and Burnout

#### Part 1: Review of Concepts

- *Stress* is a description of the body’s response to demands or threats in the environment. It is a natural response to a perceived threat to life or safety and is typically detected first as a physical response.
- *Stressors* are events or experiences that elicit the stress response in the body.
- Long-term exposure to *stressors* and *stress* can result in physical symptoms which can include:
  - Headaches
  - Stomachaches
  - Fatigue
  - Stomach ulcers
  - Colitis
- Caregivers of individuals with autism report experiencing more stress than is reported by the general population and are at risk for *burnout*.
- *Burnout* is the physical or emotional exhaustion that comes as a result of prolonged exposure to stress and has been associated with job dissatisfaction and poor staff retention.

#### Part 2: Discussion Questions for Staff

1. *What are the three dimensions of burnout?*
  - **Answer:** The three dimensions of burnout are:
    - Emotional exhaustion – Often called “blunted affect” it can look like depression and is also linked to tension, anxiety, fatigue and insomnia.
    - Depersonalization – Occurs when a stressed individual begins treating individuals in their care as objects or numbers due to lack of energy.
    - Reduced feeling of personal accomplishment – The feeling that one has a lack of control and low self-efficacy.
2. *How might you recognize stress and burnout in yourself?*
  - **Answer:** There is not a “correct” answer for this question. Encourage discussion among staff about their thoughts.
3. *How might you recognize stress and burnout in others?*
  - **Answer:** There is not a “correct” answer for this question. Encourage discussion among staff about their thoughts.