Module 2: The Organizational Resiliency Model

Purpose

The purpose of this module is to explain how the five core elements of resiliency relate to the organizational resiliency model. The module also indicates how strategies can be implemented through policies, supervisory techniques, and competency-based training.

Lessons

1. The Organizational Resiliency Model

2. Example Strategies for Implementation

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- Describe how the five core elements of resiliency relate to the organizational resiliency model.

- Describe three ways organizations can implement strategies through the organizational resiliency model.

Worksheets

No worksheets are required.

1. The Organizational Resiliency Model

The five core elements of resiliency are the foundation of the organizational resiliency model. The model is based on the premise that an organization can take action to build strengths in these core elements in staff and volunteers.

Essentially, the organizational resiliency model takes the five core elements of resiliency and identifies strategies that will build staff and volunteer strengths in each of those elements. Those strategies can be implemented in three ways; through:

- The policies adopted by the organization.

- The supervisory techniques practiced by managers and supervisors.

- The competency-based training offered to staff and volunteers.

The organizational resiliency model recognizes that there is always stress within an organization and the organization should always be taking steps to address it. The model also supports the ideas that:

- Organizational resiliency is pro-active, not re-active.

- The organization should be engaged in an ongoing effort to promote resiliency in all areas that are resiliency strengths, that is, the five core elements.

- Where the curriculum for NVAA provided strategies on what individuals could do to build resiliency in themselves, the organizational resiliency model provides strategies in areas where the organization has authority; that is, in the policy, supervisory techniques, or competency-based training provided or made available.

- These strategies all come from evidence-based research, expert judgment, and practice wisdom.

Building resiliency in staff and volunteers is one way organizations can minimize the negative effects of child abuse work. When they are more resilient, staff and volunteers are more capable of providing the services children need. As individuals, we can take steps to increase our resiliency by building capacity in these elements. As managers, we can also apply the five elements of resiliency at the organizational level.

As an example, we're going to take a look at a video that shows how one organization developed a training program to build resiliency in CASA and CAC volunteers.

The purpose of the training you'll see in the video is to normalize reactions and reduce the negative impact of child abuse on volunteers. During the training, volunteers identify concerns or issues, which are listed on a tear sheet. Each concern or issue is then addressed by one of the facilitators or by the participants themselves, showing the strong relationships at work in this peer support model.

The video *Building Resiliency Through Training* is an example of how an organization could build strong relationships (one of the core elements) through training – one of the three ways that strategies can be implemented. The strategy is evidence-based and described in books by Dutton and Rubenstein (2013) and Figley (2013). These researchers found that compassionate problem-solving among staff and volunteers reaps significant long-term benefits in terms of productivity, commitment, and enhanced resilience.

Remember, training is only one way you can build resiliency. Policies and supervisory techniques are other ways that organizational resiliency can be built.

- When we refer to policies, what are some of the policies that your organization develops that affect resiliency? Do you have any influence over policy making?

- How about supervision and supervisory techniques? Most if not all of you attending this training are supervisors or managers. What can you do, at your level, to influence the resiliency of your staff?

- Finally, let's address competency-based training. Do any of your organizations have training related to resiliency? Can you tell us about them?

2. Example Strategies for Implementation

The strategies you put into practice to build resiliency in your organization depend in large part on the challenges your organization is facing.

Today you'll begin identifying and working with the challenges in your own organizations. But before we do that, we're going to look at some examples.

We're going to identify three common challenges that relate to each of the five elements of resiliency. We'll show you how each challenge has been successfully addressed by one strategy, and whether the strategy represents policy, supervisory techniques, or competency-based training.

Remember that the challenges we'll discuss do not represent a comprehensive list of challenges faced by child abuse organizations, nor do they apply to all organizations.

These challenges relate to the resiliency element, personal perspective and meaning.

- Our first challenge occurs when an employee feels a disconnect between their values and the organization's values. This occurs when there is a mismatch between employee values and the organizational culture that keeps the employee from feeling fulfilled or satisfied at work.

- The second challenge is that the organization does not provide opportunities for staff and volunteers to discuss personal perspective and meaning, to reflect and process.

- The third challenge is the difficulty accepting that we can't fix everything. We want to but we simply can't.

Think for a moment about a strategy that would address each challenge. Remember, an organization could address these challenges by implementing a new policy or changing one that exists, making competency-based training available, or using supervisory techniques that address this issue from a strength-based perspective.

To address the first challenge (i.e., disconnect between individual and organizational values), you could provide opportunities to discuss the employee's values and the organization's values, how they are similar and different, and what his or her options are, such as taking on new assignments, changing jobs, or possibly leaving the organization. If it's necessary for the employee to leave the organization, make sure it's done in a positive way.

To address meaning making, you might conduct a "vision board" activity where employees and staff create a collage of pictures representing their resilience, and how they make meaning in this work.

For the third challenge, as a supervisor you could encourage reflective practice. Reflective practice involves thinking about your work and analyzing your decisionmaking. This critical evaluation refocuses your thinking on your existing knowledge and helps generate new knowledge and ideas. As a result, you may modify your actions, behavior, treatments, and learning needs. Reflections can be shared in a group or written in a personal journal.

There is significant evidence that reflections and narrative writings can help providers make meaning of the difficult work they do. In a 2009 article in *Progress in Palliative Care,* J.D. Sexton and other researchers found that expressive writing is a time-efficient and easy-to-use intervention to help caregivers cope with job stress and turnover.

Let's move on to the next element – a sense of hope. The following are challenges that need to be addressed to allow a sense of hope to foster resiliency.

- Our first challenge is that the organization doesn't do anything to help employees relax or have fun at work.

- The second challenge is a lack of recognition and reward for work well done. Even though there is hard work involved, it isn't acknowledged by organizational leaders.

- The third challenge is the inability to see the results of the work conducted with children. You can work with a child for a long time, but some of those results aren't immediately apparent.

To address the first challenge – an organization's failure to appreciate the importance of fun – you could hold an enjoyable activity like a "Movie Day" and show a popular uplifting movie at work, one day a month. By doing this, the staff can relax and let go of some of the stress associated with the work.

For the lack of recognition and reward, you could send personal thank you notes to the staff after particularly challenging cases. This is a more personal way of acknowledge staff contribution and dedication.

To address the third challenge, you could incorporate research on resilient children. For example, incorporate findings from psychologist Emmy Werner's research on resilient children into your competency-based training. Dr. Werner is best known in the field of child development for her leadership of a 40-year longitudinal study of 698 infants in Hawaii (1992).

The study supported the conventional wisdom that many children exposed to reproductive and environmental risk factors (for instance, premature birth coupled with an unstable household and a mentally ill mother) go on to experience more problems with delinquency, mental and physical health, and family stability than children exposed to fewer such risk factors.

However, among Werner's most significant findings was that one third of all high-risk children displayed resilience and developed into caring, competent, and confident adults despite their problematic development histories.

She and her fellow researchers identified a number of *protective factors* in the lives of these resilient individuals which helped to balance out risk factors at critical periods in their development. Among these factors were a strong bond with a nonparent caretaker (such as an aunt, babysitter, or teacher) and involvement in a church or community group.

Findings like this can give staff and volunteers hope that abused children can, and do, go on to lead productive, happy lives.

Healthy coping is the third element.

▪ Our first challenge for healthy coping is a lack of followup when it comes to critical incidents. Staff is not regularly checked with to ensure that they are processing the work they do in a healthy and productive manner.

▪ The second is low or no flexibility in the work schedule. By not being able to help meet family obligations, or take some time away from work after dealing with a difficult case, some staff members' coping skills suffer.

▪ The third challenge for healthy coping is the effect of stress on health. There are numerous studies that show the effects of stress on health, and by not applying healthy coping skills, the stress is even greater on those who work in this field.

To address the first challenge, you might consider creating a protocol for debriefing critical incidents. Increased supervision will ensure that the debriefing protocol is being followed and that supervisors are available for discussing difficult cases.

A 2009 study by Barak and others found there are links between an employee's perception of the quality of supervision, feelings of receiving emotional support from supervision, and the employee's sense of competence, personal accomplishment, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction.

When supervisors provide tangible work-related advice and instruction, employees feel empowered, have greater job satisfaction, and are more likely to be retained.

For the second challenge – lack of flexibility in the work schedule – an organization might establish flexible work hours. This would allow the staff to meet family obligations, or plan their time so that they could step away from the office.

For the third challenge an organization could develop a training program to focus on exercise, health, and nutrition. The staff could implement the latest techniques to stay healthy both physically and mentally to reduce the effects of stress on their lives.

Let's move on to the resiliency element, strong relationships.

- Our first challenge related to strong relationships is a lack of communication within the organization. Lack of communication can make staff feel isolated and can challenge the relationship-building processes.

- The second is a lack of support. Staff members sometimes feel that they don't have the support of others within the organization when difficult challenges present themselves.

- The third challenge for strong relationships is a lack of teamwork with other agencies. When teamwork is absent, work conducted between agencies suffers.

To address the first challenge – lack of communication– an organization should create a safe environment – an organizational culture – where staff can speak up for a change. Staff should be encouraged to ask if they feel isolated. They should also be encouraged to let the organization know if they feel that communication is lacking.

To address lack of support, mentoring programs could be put in place to match new employees with existing employees. This helps integrate new members into the team. Mentoring programs are implemented through an informal supervisory technique or through a more formal policy change. In a 2009 article in *Child Welfare,* researchers Chenot, Benton, and Kim found that supervisory support is a strong predictor of retention. However, supervisors must be proactive in their mentoring.

The third challenge for strong relationships, a lack of teamwork with other agencies, was addressed by one organization which created a plan for sharing resources with other agencies. This plan helped the organization ensure that consistent information was being provided to other organizations assisting victims.

Let's take a look at the last element, self-knowledge and insight.

- Our first challenge for self-knowledge and insight is a lack of connection to the history and mission of the organization. Employees weren't sure how they connected to past events that helped build the organization, and how they were carrying out the organization's mission.

- The second challenge is a sense of powerlessness. Staff didn't feel that their organization was giving them a sense of control through the ability to act.

- The third challenge is employee turnover.

For the first challenge – lack of connection to the history and the mission – you might display your mission statement throughout the building and at each staff member's desk. That way, employees will actively see how they contribute to the organization's mission.

To address a sense of powerlessness, you could have staff members participate in an activity in which they identify stressors by certain categories, and identify any patterns they saw.

For example, one category might be lack of time. Ask your staff what they do when they don't have enough time to do a task. Some will say they rush through things and consequently don't do a good job. Others might say they work overtime.

A person will often react with the same behaviors every time they encounter the same stressor. By identifying a pattern, or source of the stress, they may be able to think of appropriate ways to cope with it

Employee dissatisfaction and turnover can indicate issues within the organization, but it can also indicate that the right people are not being hired. Considering statements from exit interviews, it might be useful for this organization to develop a policy that incorporates an employee selection protocol, with questions that could eliminate candidates who would not be right for the job. Research backs up the benefit of interviewing protocols.

A 2009 article by Ellett, Ellett, Ellis, and Lerner in *Child Welfare* describes the development and initial implementation of a new employee selection protocol (ESP) for child welfare workers. The protocol helps employers make informed decisions about an applicant's fit for child welfare work and its unique demands and pressures. A major goal of implementing the ESP is to select more professionally committed and highly qualified applicants to strengthen employee retention and outcomes for children and families.

We've discussed several strategies that can build the elements of resiliency through policy, supervisory technique, or training. But there are many more ideas you can use.

In the next video *Strategies That Work,* you'll see how other organizations have developed strategies the build resiliency in their organizations.

You've seen several activities and strategies up to this point, but we haven't yet focused on your *own* organizations. So in the next module we'll be doing some activities that focus on your organization's specific challenges.