



An Important Free Resource for Lawyers

One of the free resources available to you as a State Bar member is the **Lawyer Assistance Program (LAP)**. From time to time, lawyers encounter a personal issue that, left unaddressed, could impair his or her ability to practice law. Accordingly, the LAP was created by lawyers for lawyers to assure that free, confidential assistance is available for any problem or issue that is impairing or might lead to impairment.

Lawyers at Particular Risk

Of all professionals, lawyers are at the greatest risk for anxiety, depression, alcoholism, drug addiction, and even suicide. As many as one in four lawyers are affected. This means it is likely that you, an associate, a partner, or one of your best lawyer friends will encounter one of these issues. Whether you need to call the LAP for yourself or to refer a colleague, all communications are completely confidential.

Anxiety and Depression

Anxiety and depression often go hand-in-hand. These conditions can be incapacitating and can develop so gradually that a lawyer is often unaware of the cumulative effect on his or her mood, habits, and lifestyle. Each condition is highly treatable, especially in the early stages. Asking for help, however, runs counter to our legal training and instincts. Most lawyers enter the profession to help others and believe they themselves should not need help.

The good news is that all it takes is a phone call. The LAP works with lawyers exclusively. The LAP has been a trusted resource for thousands of lawyers in overcoming these conditions.

Alcohol and Other Substances

Often a lawyer will get depressed and self-medicate the depression with alcohol. Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant but acts like a stimulant in the first hour or two of consumption. The worse you feel, the more you drink initially to feel better, but the more you drink, the worse you feel. A vicious cycle begins. On the other hand, many alcoholic lawyers who have not had depression report that their drinking started normally at social events and increased slowly over time.

There is no perfect picture of the alcoholic or addicted lawyer. It may be surprising to learn that he or she probably graduated in the top one-third of the class. Also surprising, lawyers may find themselves in trouble with addiction due to the overuse or misuse of certain prescription medications that were originally prescribed to address a temporary condition. Use of these kinds of medications, combined with moderate amounts of alcohol, greatly increases the chances of severe impairment requiring treatment. The LAP knows the best treatment options available, guides lawyers through this entire process, and provides ongoing support at every stage.

LAP recognizes alcoholism, addiction, and mental illness as diseases, not moral failures. The only stigma attached to these illnesses is the refusal to seek or accept help.



Confidentiality

All communications with the LAP are strictly **confidential** and subject to the attorney-client privilege. If you call to seek help for yourself, your inquiry is confidential. If you call as the spouse, child, law partner, or friend of a lawyer whom you suspect may need help, your communication is also treated confidentially and is never relayed without your permission to the lawyer for whom you are seeking help. The LAP has a committee of trained lawyer volunteers who have personally overcome these issues and are committed to helping other lawyers overcome them. If you call a LAP volunteer, your communication is also treated as confidential.

The LAP is completely separate from the disciplinary arm of the State Bar. If you disclose to LAP staff or to a LAP volunteer any misconduct or ethical violations, it is confidential and cannot be disclosed. See Rules 1.6(c) and 8.3(c) of the Rules of Professional Conduct and 2001 FEO 5. The LAP works because it provides an opportunity for a lawyer to get **safe, free, confidential** help before the consequences of any impairment become irreversible.

*Know the signs. Make the call.
You could save a colleague's life.*



TAKE THE TEST FOR DEPRESSION

YES NO

- 1. Do you feel a deep sense of depression, sadness, or hopelessness most of the day?
- 2. Have you experienced diminished interest in most or all activities?
- 3. Have you experienced significant appetite or weight change when not dieting?
- 4. Have you experienced a significant change in sleeping patterns?
- 5. Do you feel unusually restless...or unusually sluggish?
- 6. Do you feel unduly fatigued?
- 7. Do you experience persistent feelings of hopelessness or inappropriate feelings of guilt?
- 8. Have you experienced a diminished ability to think or concentrate?
- 9. Do you have recurrent thoughts of death or suicide?

If you answer yes to five or more of these questions (including questions #1 or #2), and if the symptoms described have been present nearly every day for two weeks or more, you should consider speaking to a health care professional about treatment options for depression.

Other explanations for these symptoms may need to be considered. Call the Lawyer Assistance Program.

Adapted from *American Psychiatric Association: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. Fourth Edition. Washington, DC. American Psychiatric Association: 1994.

TAKE THE TEST FOR ALCOHOLISM

YES NO

- 1. Do you get to work late or leave early due to drinking?
- 2. Is drinking disturbing your home life?
- 3. Do you drink because you are shy with other people?
- 4. Do you wonder if drinking is affecting your reputation?
- 5. Have you gotten into financial difficulties as a result of drinking?
- 6. Does drinking make you neglect your family or family activities?
- 7. Has your ambition decreased since drinking?
- 8. Do you often drink alone?
- 9. Does drinking determine the people you tend to be with?
- 10. Do you want a drink at a certain time of day?
- 11. Do you want a drink the next morning?
- 12. Does drinking cause you to have difficulty sleeping?
- 13. Do you drink to build up your confidence?
- 14. Have you ever been to a hospital or institution because of drinking?
- 15. Do family or friends ever question the amount you drink?

If your answer is yes to two or more of these questions you may have a problem. Call the Lawyer Assistance Program.

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