



Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program

Easy Ways to De-Stress

"We now understand that higher-level thinking is more likely to occur in the brain of a student who is emotionally secure than in the brain of a student who is scared, upset, anxious, or stressed." ~Laura. L. Sagan and Thomas S. Mawhinney

Stress, the body's physiological response to something the mind perceives as dangerous, negatively impacts our ability to function at our full potential. The aforementioned quote does not just apply to students, though it is especially applicable for law students. In order to access higher-level thinking, human beings cannot be in a fight or flight, freeze or faint process. If we are chronically angry, scared, in a victim or "poor me" mentality, anxious, tired, or feeling out of control, we cannot access the parts of the brain necessary to make complex decisions. As a law student, and later as an attorney or judge, making complex decisions and using higher-level thinking are daily requirements. Being a law student is highly stressful, but you do not have the luxury of succumbing to stress. There are simple and quick ways to de-stress when your nervous system is getting carried away. When you find yourself needing to be cool, calm, and collected, give one of these ideas a try:

1. **Don't believe everything you think:** Take a moment to question your thoughts and your assessment of the situation. Is there another way of perceiving what is happening around you?
2. **Get out of your own way:** If you want to feel better, stop thinking negative thoughts.
3. **Don't forget to breath:** Take a real deep breath into your belly. Take 5 seconds to inhale, and at least 5 seconds to exhale.

4. **Remember you have a body:** Take a moment to do a body scan. It's easy to get caught up in our thoughts when our nervous system gets overloaded. Feel your feet on the floor, feel yourself seated in the chair, feel your back against the chair, etc.
5. **Stop and listen:** Rather than thinking ahead to what you are going to say in response, listen to the person speaking to you. Don't let your mind wander. Focus on the present moment and what is being communicated.
6. **Think about your purpose:** It doesn't have to be the meaning of life, but take a moment to remember why you are doing what you are doing. Be mindful about your actions and your words. Think and speak with purpose.

It is easier than you think to reduce your stress levels. While taking vacations and time off during a semester break helps, it's far better and easier to prevent stress on a daily basis by engaging in mindfulness techniques like those listed above. Start today!

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Do you need help coping with your stressors and letting them go? Your Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program provides free and confidential services for judges, lawyers, and law students. If you need resources for ANY issue that is compromising your ability to be a productive member of the legal community, or if there is someone you are concerned about, contact COLAP at (303) 986-3345. For more information about COLAP, please visit www.coloradolap.org.