



## COLORADO LAWYER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

### Don't Suffer in Silence

*Just because you don't understand it doesn't mean it isn't so. ~Lemony Snicket (aka Daniel Handler)*

When we hear terms like depression, anxiety, personality disorder, mental health disorder, or substance use disorder, many of us stop listening. Why is that? Historically, mental health and substance use issues carried stigma with them because society was, in general, ignorant about them, and that ignorance bred irrational fear and judgement. Stigma was a major barrier to people getting treatment for those issues. Now, however, the biggest barrier to people seeking resources is financial. Since stigma is not as extreme as it used to be (because the general public has gained a better understanding, and because we know that prevention and treatment saves billions in the cost to society), why do we still tune out the conversation? Most likely it's because we do not believe these are issues that affect us. Since most requirements for diagnoses include something like "these symptoms impair functioning," we might be correct in our own assessment because we technically do not meet the diagnostic criteria. But what if we experience symptoms such as anxiety or depression, which cause personal distress, but don't impair our ability to function?

Terms like a "functioning alcoholic" or "normal neurotic" might be used to describe someone who has a mental health or substance use issue but who can make it through school, keep a job, and maintain relationships without severe consequences. But what about the internal suffering that person goes through? What if we find ourselves continuously stressed and we are restless, hypervigilant, irritable, obsessing about the negative or the past, and/or worrying or obsessively trying to plan for the future (ie. anxiety)? Or if we are often exhausted, have difficulty concentrating, experience sleep disturbances, and are persistently sad/pessimistic/numb (ie. depression)? Or what if we start self-medicating with alcohol or other drugs to help deal with stress, anxiety and depression, and now we're consistently using more than we used to?

Just because we aren't "diagnosable" doesn't mean we can't benefit from getting help. Maybe that help takes the form of educating ourselves about issues relating to mental health or substance use issues. Maybe it's starting a conversation with someone we trust about how life has been going for us. Maybe it's finally taking some time off work or school to rest and recuperate. Research shows that law students experience issues like anxiety, depression, and substance abuse at higher rates than other graduate students, and at higher rather than the general public, yet they are less likely to seek assistance. Judges, lawyers, and law students require confidential assistance in order to request help or assistance with issues in their lives.

If you are someone you know could benefit from some help, call your Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program to see what resources are available to you for *confidential* assistance.

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