



Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program

The Importance of Self-Care for Law Students

The most important relationship you have is the one with yourself. Sounds corny, doesn't it? But it's true. The beliefs you have about yourself; the way you talk to yourself; how you see yourself; how you treat yourself; and what you think about yourself **directly** impacts your mood, your physical and mental health, how you treat others, your relationships, your ability to learn; and your memory, to name a few.

Do you metaphorically “kick yourself in the butt” more than you “pat yourself on the back?” As a group, law students tend to do this more often than not due to the pressures and responsibility that accompany the study of law, the bar exam, and becoming an attorney. The stakes seem high, and the competition of being graded on a curve can increase the stress and pressure. When under such pressure, the brain can go into a fight-or-flight mode that makes us more susceptible to being negative and hypercritical of ourselves. It also makes many law students vulnerable to self-medicating through mind altering substances such as alcohol, drugs, and over use of prescription drugs. Most of us go to law school to help others, which requires having a high level of compassion and understanding. This ability is one that you should also direct toward yourself. Being unduly hard on yourself affects many other people because our perception of reality is also based on how we view ourselves. Research shows that the way a human being reacts to a situation or another person is based on past experiences and current mood. When we are in a “bad mood,” our decisions or reactions will be different than if we are in a “good mood.” Objectivity and neutrality can be effected by how we feel, which can negatively impact our performance in school or our decisions in our personal life.

In order to assist your ability to be neutral in your legal analysis at school or in your work, and to be happier when you are at home or with friends, take a few minutes and think about how you treat yourself. Do you take care of your physical health, exercise, eat well, and

meditate? Do you take care of your emotional health, soothing yourself when you experience negative emotions and encouraging yourself when you need a cheering squad? Do you take care of your mental health, such as thinking positive thoughts instead of self-deprecating thoughts, allowing yourself to focus on what is important to you and to rest your mind when you need it rather than racing thoughts all the time?

In general, when we neglect to care for ourselves, the care and nurturing we provide to others suffers. As Sharon Salzberg said:

“Generosity coming from self-hatred becomes martyrdom. Morality coming from self-hatred becomes ridged repression. Love for others without the foundation of love for ourselves becomes a loss of boundaries, codependency, and a painful & fruitless search for intimacy.”

There are many simple things you can do on a daily basis to take care of yourself, to create happy moments, and to combat loneliness and depression. Some examples include watching a sunrise or sunset, playing with your pets, watching a funny TV show or movie, and singing out loud to your favorite song.

See the links below to find more ways to build a better relationship with yourself.

<http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2013/01/13/6-ways-you-can-have-a-healthy-relationship-with-yourself/>

<http://blogs.psychcentral.com/relationships-balance/2013/11/17/self-relationship-10-ways-to-create-a-happy-moment/>

<http://psychcentral.com/lib/10-way-to-build-and-preserve-better-boundaries/0007498>

<http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2013/11/08/feeling-lonely-tonight-7-strategies-to-combat-loneliness/>

By Sarah Myers, JD, LMFT, LAC
Clinical Director, Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program
© Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program, 2017

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.