

The Importance of Seeking Support

Sarah Myers, Esq., LMFT, LAC

The practice of law is a demanding vocation. We are exposed to factors known to contribute to poor physical and mental health: unpredictability, contact with highly stressed or traumatized clients, long hours, and perfectionism. In addition, our skills are called upon in adversarial, fast-paced, and results driven environments. This is not to mention the plethora of personal struggles and worries we might each be facing. For many of us, these demands can lead to maladaptive coping strategies if the resources or self-care techniques we've used in the past aren't enough to combat the stressors we are experiences, and we might have a difficult time bouncing-back.

For a profession dedicated to helping others, we are notoriously deficient in helping ourselves. Many of us put our clients', firms', or employers' needs ahead of our own, and, in some cases, ahead of our coworkers, colleagues, family, and friends. Yet, the ability to ask for support for personal or professional issues is a characteristic of successful individuals—it demonstrates both intelligence and resiliency. Despite the misperception that we should know everything because we solve problems for a living, we are just as human as everyone else, and it's very difficult for the human brain to process problems, particularly our own, when we're stressed, overwhelmed, anxious, depressed, or overusing psychoactive chemicals like alcohol that compromise problem-solving abilities.

During times of extreme or chronic stress, we might not be experiencing a diagnosable behavioral health issue, but we can still experience a level of suffering that impacts our personal or professional life. When our stress and unmet needs are left unaddressed and unanswered, we might engage in potentially destructive behavior or tendencies, such as problematic self-medicating with alcohol or other drugs, sabotaging profession or personal obligations and relationships, social withdrawal, isolation, and other forms of emotional numbing.

We know when we (or someone we care about, from loved ones to colleagues) might need some assistance navigating their stressors when we feel or experience:

- Eating or sleeping too much or too little;
- Increase in use of drugs or alcohol;
- Pulling away from people and usual activities;
- Feeling numb or like nothing matters, or having low or no energy;
- Overcome by grief from loss;
- Feeling unusually confused, forgetful, on edge, angry, upset, worried, or scared;
- Exhibiting hostile, inappropriate, or readily tearful/overwhelmed behavior in personal or professional situations;
- Missing deadlines or appointments;
- Not returning calls; or
- Struggling with record-keeping, managing funds, and so on.

While circumstances might feel unsurmountable when we are dealing with them, they are not. We've all gone through difficult times in our lives and there are many resources available to get through them in ways that increase our resilience, grit, intelligence, and potential for success. We aren't superheroes, and we aren't invincible to suffering. Maybe you can't identify exactly what is wrong, but you know that something isn't going well, and you could use some direction on how to process it, or you could use some help figuring out how to help someone else you care about. If that is the case, there is no need to tough it out alone.

For the legal community, and their staff and family, the Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program (COLAP) staff can help you make sense of personal or professional concerns, and provide various options and choices for your circumstances, or your concern for a loved one or colleague. COLAP is a broad-brush program with many resources to assist our judges, lawyers, law students and legal professionals. The legal community feels safe contacting COLAP because of our strict and heightened confidentiality, and because of the specialized and tailored assistance available. Regardless of the reason, we can assist that person in finding the "next step" in getting back on track or connected to helpful resources. That "next step" may include life coaching; referrals to clinical professionals, therapists, or career counselors; referral to resources available for the legal community; organizing a free ethics CLE on wellbeing topics for your workplace or legal organization; or pairing with a COLAP volunteer.

Without your own wellness intact, your relationship with clients and your work product could suffer, not to mention your interpersonal relationships with family, friends, and most importantly, yourself. When the members of our legal profession are mentally, emotionally, and physically healthy, the legal system and the public in general benefit. Whether you have questions about our services, already know what issues you need help with, or would like an individual or workplace consultation, contact COLAP today to get started on the path of increased personal and professional well-being. •



Sarah Myers is the Executive Director of the Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program (COLAP). COLAP is the free, confidential, and independent well-being program for the legal community of Colorado. For more information, go to www.coloradolap.org. For a confidential consultation, discussion about your stressors, or to obtain helpful resources, contact COLAP at 303-986-3345 or info@coloradolap.org.



Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program

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