

# Wellness | *Ten Tips for Lawyers Dealing with Stress, Mental Health, and Substance Use Issues*

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For those practicing law in Texas, it may be no surprise that lawyers suffer very high rates of mental health and substance use disorders. Attorneys have the highest rate of depression of any occupational group in the United States.\*\*\* A 1990 study indicated that attorneys suffer depression 3.6 times as often as the general population. With regard to alcohol use, researchers have found that attorneys have almost double the usual rate of problem drinking.

Regarding suicide, lawyers have historically topped the list of all professionals in suicide rates. They have been found to be twice as likely as the average person to die by suicide. A study of almost 13,000 employed attorneys showed that 45.7% of attorneys reported suffering from depression during their careers.

Obviously, these are major problems. The following are ten practical tips which any affected attorney should consider:

**1. Take Action!** Whether a lawyer is living in the darkness of depression or lost in a routine of substance abuse, there is a solution, but it depends on action. Taking action requires courage. By expressing the need for help to someone, the process to peace begins.

**2. Set Boundaries.** Boundaries are important for a person practicing self-care. How does one establish healthy boundaries? Know that you have a right to personal and professional boundaries. Set clear and decisive limits and let people know what you expect and when they have crossed the line, acted inappropriately or disrespected you.

**3. Connect with Others.** Connecting with others who know first-hand what you are going through can help reduce the fear and hopelessness that is often connected to mental health and substance use disorders. A growing body of research shows that the need to connect socially with others is as basic as our need for food, water and shelter. Fortunately, Texas Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers support groups exist all over the state. For a schedule, go to [www.tlaphelps.org](http://www.tlaphelps.org).

**4. Practice Acceptance.** Acceptance is a big, meaningful word which encompasses a variety of important tools for a person seeking a positive life change. First, being able to honestly accept the place where you are at present is an important step in making a change. Acceptance of the fact that you have an issue for which help is needed is a major part of solving the problem.

**5. Learn to Relax.** For attorneys, relaxing can seem almost impossible. The mind is an instrument, but sometimes it seems that the instrument has become the master. Breathing exercises, meditation, and mindfulness practices have been very effective for attorneys who need to relax, or “quiet the mind.” TLAP’s website ([www.tlaphelps.org](http://www.tlaphelps.org)) includes links to breathing exercises and other ways to relax.

**6. Practice Positive Thinking.** Studies have shown that taking the time to make a list of things for which you are grateful can result in significant improvement in the way you feel and the amount of happiness you experience. Try making a list of three to five things for which you are grateful each morning for a week and see what happens.

**7. Help Others.** Service work sounds like just one more thing to add to the list of things you do not have time for, but this is something helpful for you, so consider really making time to do it. Obviously, until you secure your oxygen mask, you should not attempt to rescue others, but lawyers have been found to gain “intense satisfaction” from doing service work, and studies show it helps improve mental health and happiness.

8. **Live in the Present.** This cliché phrase may be one of the most under-appreciated tools for the legal profession of any listed here. As lawyers, this sounds like a joke. Deadlines loom. Trials approach. How can this work? Try it. Consider during your day the things which you are able to do that day.
9. **Expand your Spirituality or Consciousness.** Whatever the variety, research has shown that expanding this area of life makes a major impact of the wellbeing of people, and particularly lawyers. Spirituality has many definitions, but at its core spirituality brings context to our lives and the struggles within them. For many lawyers dealing with the legal world and its many issues, expanding the spiritual life or a life beyond “self-focus” is invaluable.
10. **Keep it Real.** Recovering from a mental health or substance abuse problem requires honesty. If you begin to feel like you should be better than you are, but you are embarrassed to let others down by admitting your true condition, you are doing yourself a major disservice. Commit to be honest with someone about how you are doing so that you do not lose touch with those who can help.

If you or a lawyer, law student, or judge you know needs help, TLAP is available to provide guidance and support at 1(800)343-TLAP (8527).

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\*\*\* For all citations of statistics in this article, visit

<https://www.texasbar.com/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Wellness1&Template=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=30326>.