



## Oregon Attorney Assistance Program

*presents*

### **A CLE for Supervising Attorneys & Law Professors:**

Enhancing the Well-Being and  
Performance of Law Students & Newer  
Lawyers

**Wednesday, September 16, 2020**  
12:30 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

#### **Presenters:**

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Oregon Attorney  
Assistance Program

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**ZOOM webinar**

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**A CLE for Professors & Supervising Attorneys**  
***Enhancing the Well-Being and Performance***  
***of Law Students and Newer Lawyers***  
**September 16, 2020**  
**12:30 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.**

**I. Introduction**

- A. Welcome.
- B. Oregon Attorney Assistance Program (OAAP)
  - 1. OAAP Services.
  - 2. Access.

**II. Today's Goal**

- A. Enhancing the *Well-Being* of Law Students & New Lawyers – Recognizing, engaging, and supporting them in their academic, prof'l, and personal lives.
  - 1. Proactive enhancing;
  - 2. Responsive (in the moment) enhancing;
  - 3. Supportive enhancing.
- B. What is *Well-Being*? Thriving in multiple dimensions of one's life. (See Appendix.)
  - 1. Emotional health;
  - 2. Intellectual or creative endeavors;
  - 3. Occupational pursuits;
  - 4. Spiritual or existential areas;
  - 5. Physical health;
  - 6. Social connections/support;
  - 7. Cultural sensitivity;
  - 8. Continue process of thriving;
- C. Why *Well-Being* is important.
  - 1. Tend to get into fewer crises;
  - 2. Tend to handle crises better;
  - 3. Tend to be more resilient following crises;
  - 4. Tend to be resource for others;
  - 5. Tend to be more personally, socially, and professionally stable and successful;
  - 6. Tend to enjoy life more!

**III. Well-Being, Adversity, and Different Response Styles**

- A. Different people, different response styles:
  - 1. Intentionally healthy, normally resilient.

2. Generally healthy, but occasionally vulnerable/less resilient.
  3. Frequently vulnerable; often struggle with resiliency.
- B. Why are these distinctions helpful to keep in mind?
1. Helps to better distinguish between “the problems” and “the individual”;
  2. Helps us respond more effectively when we have an idea of other person’s response style.

#### IV. Law Students & Newer Lawyers – Current Substance Use/Mental Health Research

- A. Law Students - Research findings (2016 Survey of Law Student Well-Being – SLSWB) <https://jle.aals.org/home/vol66/iss1/13/>.
1. FINDINGS re Problem Substance Use & Mental Health:
    - a. Alcohol & drugs: High rates of binge drinking; 25% at risk of alcoholism;
    - b. Mental health: Problematic rates anxiety and depression that *increase* through law school;
    - c. Help seeking: Significant % of those needing help are reluctant to get it; those most in need of help are most reluctant to seek it;
    - d. Reluctance: Fear that disclosure would affect: Bar admission, academic status, and social stigma.
- B. Lawyers (& Newer Lawyers) – Research findings (2016 ABA/Hazelden National Study – *The Prevalence of Substance Use and Other Mental Health Concerns Among American Attorneys*)  
[https://journals.lww.com/journaladdictionmedicine/fulltext/2016/02000/The Prevalence of Substance Use and Other Mental.8.aspx](https://journals.lww.com/journaladdictionmedicine/fulltext/2016/02000/The_Prevalence_of_Substance_Use_and_Other_Mental.8.aspx)
1. FINDINGS re Problem Alcohol Use:
    - a. Problematic alcohol use: 21% (c.f., 8-10% in general population);
    - b. *Private firms* had *highest* rates (23%) when compared to other practice environments (e.g., solos, corporate, government, etc.);
    - c. *Newer lawyers* (first 10 yrs of practice) – highest rates (28%) when compared to lawyers practicing longer;
    - d. Primary barrier to seeking treatment: Stigma (not wanting others to find out).
  2. FINDINGS re Mental Health (Depression, Anxiety, Unhealthy Stress):
    - a. Elevated rates of Depression (28%), Anxiety (19%), unhealthy stress (23%) within legal profession;
    - b. The distribution of conditions found high rates in private law firms and among newer lawyers.
  3. Significant % of lawyers with problematic substance use/mental health issues *do not* seek treatment; Reason: Stigma – don’t want others to find out.

**V. National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being (2017) – Response to the Research**

<https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/images/abanews/ThePathToLawyerWellBeingReportRevFINAL.pdf>

- A. Consensus: Action is necessary;
- B. Recommendations for *all* Stakeholders (Law firms, law schools, bar assoc., etc.):
  - A. Recommendations for Legal Employers, p.31
  - B. Recommendations for Law Schools, p. 35

**VI. Recommendations to Law Firms and Law Schools**

- A. Law Firms: How to create a work environment that educates lawyers and staff, reduces stigma, encourages help-seeking & help-giving:
  - 1. Provide health and well-being resources to lawyers in their work environments;
  - 2. Provide training/education to attorneys and staff to recognize signs of impairment and health-related problems (for self and others);
  - 3. Consider the role alcohol plays in social gatherings and professional events (be creative in offering non-alcoholic beverages);
  - 4. Establish response protocols for when someone is concerned about a colleague;
  - 5. Help to reduce the stigma that often accompanies lawyers' behavioral health challenges and prevents them from getting needed help;
  - 6. Establish protocols to assist lawyers needing treatment or recovering from behavioral health conditions; and
  - 7. Become familiar with the resources available through the Oregon Attorney Assistance Program.
- B. Law Schools: How to create an academic environment that educates students and faculty, reduces the stigma, encourages help-seeking & help-giving:
  - 1. Promote anonymous and confidential support groups for law students;
  - 2. Offer health, well-being, and self-care information as an integrated part of students' curricula – during new student orientation & in classrooms;
  - 3. Consider the role alcohol plays in school-sponsored social gatherings (be creative in offering non-alcoholic beverages);
  - 4. Educate faculty and staff to be alert to signs of potential problems (e.g., absenteeism, late assignments and projects, noticeable changes in mood or behavior, etc.) – and have protocols for how to address a student's potential problems;
  - 5. Increase coordination of services between law schools, OAAP, school counseling resources;
  - 6. Utilize OAAP as a resource for presentations to faculty and students, and for referrals for students needing help;

7. Address the social stigma and fear of consequences that discourage many law students from getting help;
8. Actively encourage students to reach out to help a fellow student in need and inform them who they can contact for assistance, if necessary; and
9. *Keep in mind the research findings:* (1) Rates of problematic substance use and mental health conditions among students tend to increase, *not decrease*, during law school academic careers and (2) newer lawyers tend to have highest levels of these conditions.

## **VII. Signs & Symptoms of Distress**

- A. There are some common indications when a person may be struggling with alcohol, drugs, or other mental health behavior problems. (See, Red Flags – Appendix)
- B. Dealing with Depression - <https://oaap.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/September-2018-In-Sight.pdf>

## **VIII. Protective Responses to Facing Adversity**– Common ways people emotionally/behaviorally respond in times of Adversity may be disruptive for the person and/or those around them, but also can serve as a signal of someone’s discomfort/distress.

- A. Black/white thinking and catastrophizing
- B. Pessimistic thinking;
- C. Difficulty staying in the present;
- D. Excessive substance use;
- E. Compulsive behaviors;
- F. Difficulty reaching out for help;
- G. Procrastination;  
<https://oaap.org/insight/procrastination-and-the-allure-of-tomorrow/>
- H. Isolation;
- I. Lack of resilience  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/resilience>  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/science-choice/202005/the-8-key-elements-resilience>
- J. Boundary challenges  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/sense-and-sensitivity/201201/developing-healthy-boundaries>

## **IX. Suggestions and Recommendations: Enhancing Well-Being**

- A. Must be alert to problems – not everyone asks for help; there are red flags, however, and then must make a decision whether to intervene or take some action;
- B. Effective Communication – the *sine qua non* of successfully interacting with and assisting others.

<https://oaap.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Effective-Communication.pdf><https://www.helpguide.org/articles/relationships-communication/effective-communication.htm>

## **X. Assisting a Distressed Law Student & New Lawyer**

- A. Listen, listen, listen;
- B. Be attentive and curious;
- C. Remember the Breath – it triggers Relaxation Response;  
<https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/six-relaxation-techniques-to-reduce-stress>
- D. Empathy, compassion – powerful;
- E. Be alert to red flags & signs/symptoms (See Appendix);
- F. Stigma/shame; be reaffirming;
- G. The language we use is important;
- H. Affirm person’s willingness to reach out;
- I. Encourage social connections;
- J. Following up can be valuable;
- K. Model good self-care;
- L. Be familiar with available resources (if you don’t know any contact OAAP);
- M. Share personal experience, but protect your own personal boundaries;
- N. Encourage self-help, when appropriate;
- O. Reframe help-seeking as a strength;
- P. Be alert to self-harm issues; ask!;
- Q. OAAP Recovery groups.

## **XI. Support, Guidance, and Mentorship**

- A. Newer lawyers and students often seek guidance, mentorship and, at times, a champion.
  - 1. They may not know how to ask for guidance or who to turn to.
  - 2. They most likely do not have significant mental health or substance use challenges.
  - 3. They are seeking clarity, direction, and occasionally emotional reassurance and encouragement.
- B. How to create an effective mentoring/guidance relationship with newer lawyer
  - 1. Often direction on how to tackle a work project is needed for newer lawyers.
    - a. Holding clinics and individual sessions to help newer lawyers learn how to effectively research and how much time to spend on projects will go a long way in training them and building confidence.
    - b. Helping them find a mentor that fits and becoming a mentor to a newer lawyer by offering to do so requires nothing more than connecting and brainstorming the right fit.

- c. Reading about effective mentoring and training yourself and other supervisors is the best way to be prepared.  
[https://www.abajournal.com/news/article/mentoring\\_in\\_the\\_legal\\_profession\\_has\\_had\\_to\\_adapt\\_to\\_a\\_changing\\_world](https://www.abajournal.com/news/article/mentoring_in_the_legal_profession_has_had_to_adapt_to_a_changing_world)
  - d. Remember a mentor relationship is a partnership- each will give input and each will learn from each other.
  - e. Helping newer lawyers gain clarity and define what type of mentoring they need and guiding them learn how to be in a mentor relationship will help them embrace and effectively utilize you or others as resources.
  - f. Formalizing a relationship by naming it mentoring can help.
  - g. Meeting regularly to check in on work flow and projects by having the lawyers present summaries of deadlines and what they are working on.
  - h. Monitoring the projects with the lawyer and setting project bench marks will help them stay on track.
  - i. Giving space for the listening and brain storming during sessions can be effective starting with the greatest challenges they are having.
  - j. Reviewing and critiquing projects can serve as teaching tools if you explain what looks great along with lacking/needed and/or next steps.
  - k. Not acting punitive if the newer lawyer is not dialed in.
  - l. Holding space for lawyers to talk to you about lack of understanding and discomfort with law firm culture and policies will help them learn why things are in place, help teach you about their ideas for change and their ideas of what is not working along with learning what is working.
  - m. Bringing newer lawyers along to meet key people, observe court room proceedings and depositions and listening to client advising sessions as well as give opportunity for them to have space to give input.
  - n. Admitting to the lawyer that a project or event was challenging can break stigma for asking for help.
- C. How to assist Law Students through communication/guidance/mentoring  
<https://www.wcl.american.edu/impact/lawwire/the-key-to-law-student-well-being-we-have-to-love-our-law-students/article/>  
<https://abaforlawstudents.com/2018/02/27/law-school-stress-not-about-you-all-about-you/>
- 1. Assisting Law Students.
    - a. Students today came of age with more diagnoses but also more knowledge and desire for self care but don't often turn for guidance or professional help.

- b. Know the resources of your school/community or call OAAP- school counseling, dean of students, career services mentoring programs- student to student; student with lawyer.
- c. Acknowledge to students that stressors will arise and seeking help/guidance early will help.
- d. Talking in the classroom about law school stressors and checking in on student needs from early on can foster openness and ability for students to seek guidance/help.
- e. Talking about self care and resiliency building can help.  
<https://www.resiliency.com/free-articles-resources/the-resiliency-route-to-authentic-self-esteem-and-life-success/>
- f. Encourage peer relationships.
- g. Create workshops to learn outlining, assessing cases, understanding the framework of particular class.
- h. Help students connect with lawyers in community for mentoring/guidance to figure out career path and to navigate law school.
- i. Learn how to guide/mentor students effectively and become a mentor/guide to a student(s)- this can be formal or informal.
- j. Help students access guidance/learn how to be in a mentor relationship.  
<https://www.nesl.edu/news/detail/how-to-have-an-amazing-experience-with-your-law-school-mentor>
- k. Agile Mentoring is also helpful- meeting with someone once and gaining bits and pieces of advice.  
<https://www.innovativelawstudent.com/2016/05/agile-mentoring-fresh-approach-fostering-relationships-lawyers/>

**THANK YOU!**



## **References & Resource Links**

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  - Recommendations for Law Schools (p.35)
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<https://oaap.org/national-task-force-report-on-lawyer-well-being/>
- *Survey of Law Student Well-Being*, ABA (2019).  
[https://www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer\\_assistance/research/law\\_student\\_survey/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance/research/law_student_survey/)
- *The Science of Well-Being/Recommendations During Covid*; Podcast by Yale Prof. Laurie Santos, PhD.  
<https://www.facebook.com/135578283226835/videos/642782703167460/>
- *Things To Do While Sheltering In Place* (Ap 2020). Shari Pearlman, OAAP Attorney Counselor. <https://oaap.org/thriving-today/things-to-do-while-sheltering-in-place/>



## Defining Lawyer Well-Being: A Multi-Dimensional Approach

**W**ell-being cannot be defined just by the absence of illness but also encompasses a positive state of wellness. From a whole-health perspective, it can be viewed as a continuous process in which we work across multiple dimensions of wellness. The way we function in one dimension can enhance or impede the way we function in another dimension. The [report](#) of the National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being identified six dimensions that make up full well-being for lawyers:

### 1. Occupational.

Cultivating personal satisfaction, growth, and enrichment in work; financial stability.

### 2. Emotional.

Recognizing the importance of emotions. Developing the ability to identify and manage our own emotions to support mental health, achieve goals, and inform decision-making. Seeking help for mental health when needed.

### 3. Physical.

Striving for regular physical activity, proper diet and nutrition, sufficient sleep, and recovery; minimizing the use of addictive substances. Seeking help for physical health when needed.

### 4. Intellectual.

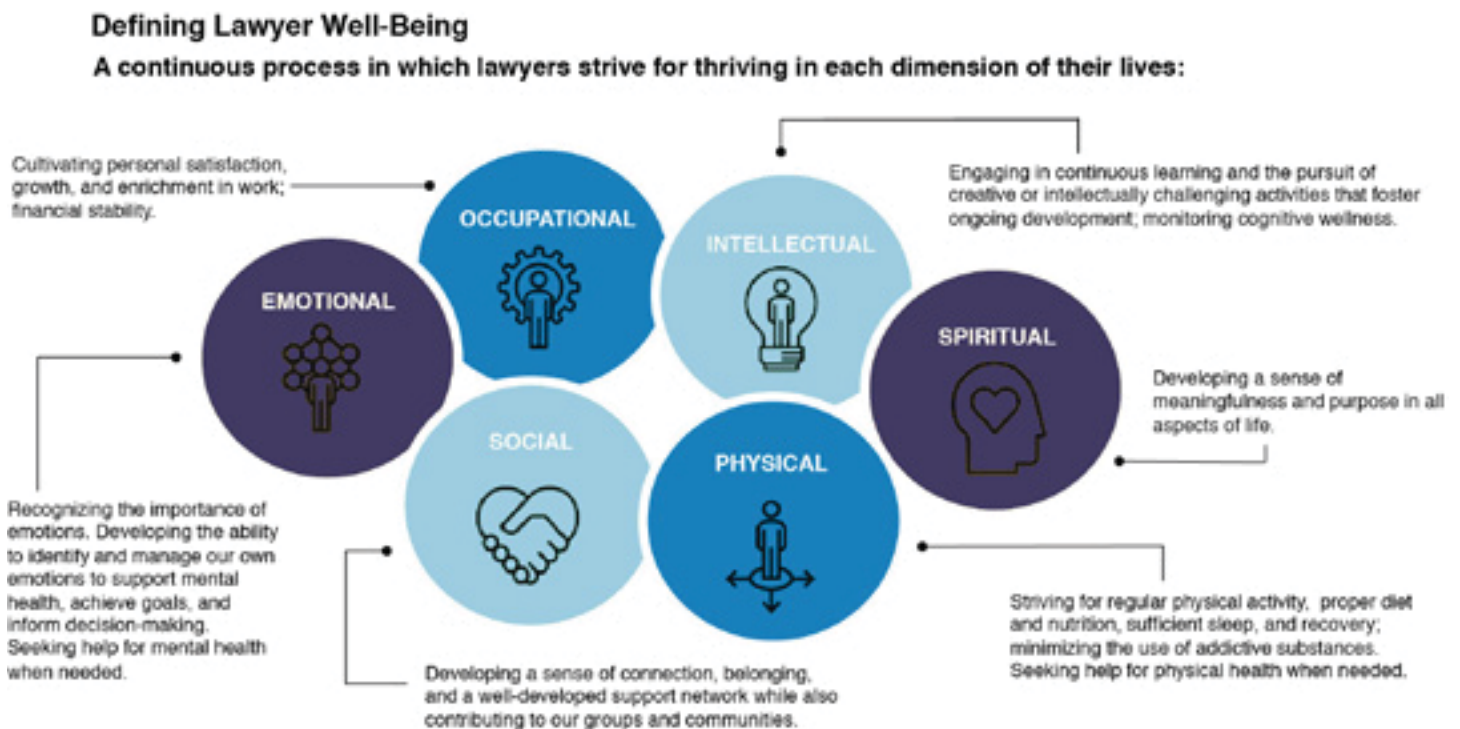
Engaging in continuous learning and the pursuit of creative or intellectually challenging activities that foster ongoing development; monitoring cognitive wellness.

### 5. Spiritual.

Developing a sense of meaningfulness and purpose in all aspects of life.

### 6. Social.

Developing a sense of connection, belonging, and a well-developed support network while also contributing to our groups and communities.



\* OAAP adds Cultural Well-Being as a 7th dimension asking you if you are fulfilled in practicing your traditional celebrations/rituals/foods/language/learning practices.



March 2018

Issue No. 107

# *IN SIGHT* for Oregon Lawyers and Judges

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

## NATIONAL TASK FORCE REPORT ON LAWYER WELL-BEING

In 2017, the National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being (Task Force), consisting of the American Bar Association (ABA) Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs and a broad coalition of other organizations, published the most comprehensive report (Report) to date on the well-being of American lawyers. The Report, *The Path to Lawyer Well-Being: Practical Recommendations for Positive Change*, relied on numerous empirical studies, two of the most notable being the recent ABA-Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation survey of nearly 13,000 currently practicing U.S. lawyers and the 2016 Survey of Law Student Well-Being, surveying over 3,300 law students from 15 law schools throughout the country. These studies revealed that many lawyers and law students struggle with anxiety, depression, and/or substance use issues.

### Well-Being in the Legal Profession

The findings of these studies and the national media attention their publication generated, sparked the creation of the Task Force and its Report. The central question for the Task Force was how the profession can best address these health concerns in a collaborative, comprehensive, and sustainable way to meet the needs of all concerned.

The Report made clear that, although a disturbing portion of our legal profession has substance use and behavioral health challenges, the majority of lawyers and law students do not. It noted, however, “. . . that does not mean that they’re thriving. Many lawyers experience a ‘profound ambivalence’ about their work, and different sectors of the profession vary in their

levels of satisfaction and well-being.” Well-being is thus more than “the absence of illness; it includes a positive state of wellness.” To be a good lawyer, the Report noted, one has to be a healthy lawyer, and the research suggests that “the current state of lawyers’ health cannot support a profession dedicated to client service and dependent on the public trust.” The Task Force thus undertook to address not only mental health and problematic substance use concerns, but also the overarching issue of lawyer well-being within the profession. How can lawyers experience well-being and actually thrive in their personal and professional lives?

The Task Force defined lawyer well-being as a continuous process whereby one seeks to thrive in six primary areas of one’s life:

**Emotional health** – identifying and managing emotions in personal and professional environments;

**Occupational pursuits** – cultivating personal satisfaction, growth, enrichment, and financial stability;

**Creative or intellectual endeavors** – engaging in continuous learning and the pursuit of creative or intellectually challenging activities;

**Spirituality** – experiencing a sense of meaningfulness and purpose in all aspects of life;

**Social connections** – developing a sense of belonging and support with others important in one’s life; and

### OREGON ATTORNEY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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**Physical health** – striving for regular physical activity, proper diet, nutrition, sufficient sleep, and recovery from the use of unhealthy substances.

### Stakeholders

The Task Force’s Report makes over 40 recommendations, some general to all stakeholders within the legal community and some very specific to each individual stakeholder group. The Report is nothing less than a call to action. It seeks to encourage through collective action significant change in the culture of the legal profession. The stakeholder groups addressed include judges, regulators, legal employers, law schools, bar associations, professional liability carriers, and lawyer assistance programs.

### Task Force Recommendations

To their credit, many of the stakeholders in Oregon are committed to lawyer well-being and have already begun implementing some of the Task Force’s recommendations. However, there is always room for additional improvement when it comes to one of the most important issues for this and future generations of our legal community.

Some of the general recommendations to all stakeholder groups include:

- Take action to minimize the stigma that is often attached to mental health and substance use disorders; encourage those with such conditions to seek help.
- Foster collegiality and respectful engagement throughout the profession; reduce chronic incivility that can foment a toxic culture that is counter to well-being.
- Promote diversity and inclusivity initiatives that encourage both individual and institutional well-being.
- Create meaningful mentoring and sponsorship programs, which research shows can aid well-being and career progress, particularly for women and diverse professionals.
- Guide and support the transition of older lawyers to, among other things, capitalize on the wealth of experience they can offer and, at the same time, reduce risks sometimes faced by senior lawyers challenged by the demands of technically evolving professional environments.

- De-emphasize alcohol at social events, and provide a variety of alternative non-alcoholic beverages at such events.

- Utilize monitoring to support recovery from substance use disorders in environments where it can be supportive.

Some of the recommendations to specific stakeholder groups include:

- Conduct judicial well-being surveys.
- Provide well-being programming for judges and staff.
- Encourage judicial participation in the activities of lawyer assistance programs, such as volunteering as speakers, particularly when the judge is in recovery him/herself.
- Educate and inform the judiciary regarding signs and symptoms associated with substance use and behavior health conditions so they are better able to identify when a lawyer may be in need of assistance.
- Adopt regulatory objectives that prioritize lawyer well-being, such as expanding continuing education requirements to include well-being topics; require law schools to create well-being education as a criterion for ABA accreditation; more closely focus on conduct and behavior rather than diagnosis and treatment as character and fitness bar admission criteria so as to avoid stigmatizing mental and behavioral health conditions and treatment; educate and accurately inform law students about bar admission criteria to reduce their fear that getting needed professional treatment will hinder their chances of bar admission.
- Adopt diversion programs and other alternatives to discipline for minor lawyer misconduct to encourage treatment for underlying substance use and mental health disorders.
- Add well-being-related questions to the multi-state professional responsibility exam.
- In legal work environments, form active lawyer well-being committees; monitor for signs of work addiction and poor self-care in legal work; and actively combat social isolation and encourage interconnectivity.
- In law schools, create best practices for assisting law students experiencing psychological distress; provide training to law school faculty regarding student mental

## What the Research Tells Us

For years, many have voiced varying degrees of concern about the physical and behavioral health of the legal profession. The findings of the two research studies referred to above clearly signaled “an elevated risk in the legal community for mental health and substance use disorders tightly intertwined with an alcohol-based social culture.” Below are some highlights of that research:

Among law students surveyed:

- 17% experienced some level of depression;
- 14% experienced severe anxiety;
- 23% had mild or moderate anxiety;
- 6% reported serious suicidal thoughts in the past year;
- 43% reported binge drinking at least once in the prior two weeks;
- Nearly one-quarter reported binge drinking two or more times in the prior two weeks;
- 25% qualified as being at risk for alcoholism for which further screening was recommended; and
- 50% reported that chances of bar admission are better if a mental health or substance use problem is hidden.

Among lawyers surveyed:

- Between 21% and 36% qualified as problem drinkers (i.e., hazardous use, possible dependence);
- 28% struggled with depression;
- 19% struggled with anxiety; and
- 23% struggled with unhealthy stress.

Lawyers with less than 10 years of practice and those working in private law firms experienced the highest rates of problem drinking and depression and elevated levels of other difficulties, including social isolation, work addiction, suicide, sleep deprivation, job dissatisfaction, and work-life conflicts.

health and substance use disorders; and develop mental health and substance use disorder resources, including taking active steps to encourage help-seeking practices by students.

- Empower law students to help fellow students in need; facilitate a confidential recovery network for students; provide educational opportunities on well-being-related topics in law schools; and discourage alcohol-centered law-school-related events.

- Encourage local and state bar associations to sponsor quality CLE programming on well-being topics, and utilize the resources of state lawyer assistance programs when appropriate.

- Emphasize well-being in loss prevention programs, including being aware of the role of lawyer impairment in claims activity.

- Among lawyer assistance programs, encourage emphasis on confidentiality; high-quality well-being programming; and appropriate and stable funding for outreach, screening, counseling, professional staffing, and preventative education.

The Task Force Report “makes a compelling case that the legal profession is at a crossroads” and the time for action is now. It is premised on the belief that, through collective action by all of us, we have the capacity to create a better future for our nation’s lawyers. Improving lawyer well-being is a win-win for everyone: it is good for clients, good for business, good for the profession – and it is the right thing to do!

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*References appear on page 4*

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June 2016

Issue No. 100

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# IN SIGHT for Oregon Lawyers and Judges

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

## NATIONAL STUDY ON LAWYER SUBSTANCE USE AND MENTAL HEALTH

For the first time ever, a national research study has been undertaken to empirically quantify the prevalence of substance use and other behavioral health conditions within the lawyer population of the United States. Results of the study, jointly undertaken by the American Bar Association (ABA) and the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation (ABA-Hazelden Study), have been published in the February 2016 edition of the *Journal of Addiction Medicine*. The study, “The Prevalence of Substance Use and Other Mental Health Concerns Among American Attorneys,” presents a revealing picture of our profession that is old news to some and disturbing news to many others.<sup>1</sup>

Nearly 13,000 currently employed attorneys completed anonymous surveys assessing alcohol and drug use and symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. Specifically, the survey utilized (1) the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT)<sup>2</sup>, a self-report instrument developed by the World Health Organization to screen for hazardous use, harmful use, and the potential for alcohol dependence; and (2) the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales-21 (DASS-21)<sup>3</sup>, a widely used self-report mental health questionnaire.

The study sample’s demographic profile was obtained by the participants’ self-reports. The personal characteristics of the group were as follows:

GENDER*	
Men	53.4%
Women	46.5%

\*Election options limited to the male-female gender binary.

AGE	
30 or younger	11.9%
31-40	25.2%
41-50	21.0%
51-60	23.2%
61-70	16.1%
71 or older	2.7%

Participants were asked to identify legal, illicit, and prescribed substance use within the preceding 12 months. Participants reported as follows:

Alcohol	84.1%
Tobacco	16.9%
Sedatives	15.7%
Marijuana	10.2%
Opioids	5.6%
Stimulants	4.8%
Cocaine	0.8%

The study also elicited detailed information about the participants’ professional characteristics, asking respondents to identify their age (≤30, 31-40, 41-50, etc.), their years in the field (≤10, 11-20, 21-30, etc.), work environments (solo practitioner, private firm, government, non-profit, corporation in-house, etc.), firm position (junior associate, senior associate, junior partner, etc.), hours worked per week (≤10, 11-20, 21-30, etc.), and whether or not they did litigation. All personal and professional data obtained were statistically analyzed, revealing the following regarding the rates of substance use<sup>4</sup> among practicing attorneys in the United States:

- Over 20% of the lawyers who responded scored at a level consistent with problematic drinking<sup>5</sup>; that is, using AUDIT criteria, they screened positive for hazardous and/or harmful use, having the potential for alcohol dependence. This rate is over twice that of the general adult population in this country.<sup>6</sup>

- Men scored significantly higher for problematic alcohol use than women, reporting 25.1% and 15.5%, respectively.

- Problematic alcohol use was highest (28.1%) among attorneys in the early stages of their careers (0-10 years), with declining rates reported thereafter:

Years in Legal Field	Problematic %
0-10	28.1%
11-20	19.2%
21-30	15.6%
31-40	15.0%
41 or more	13.2%

- Problematic alcohol use was highest (31.9%) among attorneys ages 30 or younger, with declining rates reported thereafter:

Age Category	Problematic %
30 or younger	31.9%
31-40	25.1%
41-50	19.1%
51-60	16.2%
61-70	14.4%
71 or older	12.1%

- Within different work environments, reported problematic alcohol use rates were varied, though clearly highest in private law firms (23.4%):

Work Environment	Problematic %
Private firms	23.4%
In-house gov't, public, or non-profit	19.2%
Solo practitioner	19.0%
In-house corp. or for-profit institution	17.8%

- Within private firms, reported problematic alcohol use rates tended to be inversely related to law firm seniority:

Firm Position	Problematic %
Junior associate	31.1%
Senior associate	26.1%
Junior partner	23.6%
Managing partner	21.0%
Senior partner	18.5%

The ABA-Hazelden Study produced a second, and equally revealing, set of statistical data concerning depression, anxiety, and stress within the American lawyer population, as follows:

- Utilizing the DASS-21 mental health questionnaire, male respondents reported significantly higher levels of depression than women, a finding generally contrary to conventional findings among the U.S. adult population.<sup>7</sup>

- Female respondents' anxiety and stress scores were higher than corresponding male scores.

- Depression, anxiety, and stress scores among responding lawyers generally decreased as age increased and also as years in practice increased.

- Solo practitioners in private practice reported the highest levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, followed by lawyers working in private firms.

- In private law firm environments, more senior positions were generally associated with lower reported symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress; that is, fewer senior lawyers reported greater symptom levels of these conditions.

- Significantly, when respondents' AUDIT and DASS-21 scores were compared, a correlation was found – those with problematic alcohol use scores reported higher rates of depression, anxiety, and stress.

- Finally, participating lawyers were asked about past mental health concerns over their legal career. The most common mental health conditions reported were anxiety (61.1%), depression (45.7%), social anxiety (16.1%), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (12.5%), panic disorder (8.0%), and bipolar disorder (2.4%).



While this study is subject to certain inherent limitations (e.g., participants were not randomly selected, but rather self-selected by voluntarily responding to emails, news postings, and websites; given the nature of the survey, the participants may have overstated or understated their individual symptoms, etc.), it does produce an abundance of data that seem to reinforce in an empirical way what many intuitively suspect represents a fairly accurate description of the behavioral health of our profession. At a minimum, the study does suggest that the prevalence of problematic drinking, depression, anxiety, and stress within the American lawyer population should be cause for significant concern.

In Part II of this article we will discuss some of the implications of the ABA-Hazelden Study and, in particular, provide some recommendations that may be of value in specifically assisting our Oregon legal community.

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#### *References*

<sup>1</sup> [http://journals.lww.com/journaladdictionmedicine/Fulltext/2016/02000/The\\_Prevalence\\_of\\_Substance\\_Use\\_and\\_Other\\_Mental.8.aspx](http://journals.lww.com/journaladdictionmedicine/Fulltext/2016/02000/The_Prevalence_of_Substance_Use_and_Other_Mental.8.aspx)

<sup>2</sup> <http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/Audit.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.cesphn.org.au/images/mental\\_health/Frequently\\_Used/Outcome\\_Tools/Dass21.pdf](https://www.cesphn.org.au/images/mental_health/Frequently_Used/Outcome_Tools/Dass21.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> For statistical reasons, no significant inferences could be drawn about participating lawyers' use or misuse of substances other than alcohol.

<sup>5</sup> The AUDIT generates scores ranging from 0 to 40. Scores of 8 or higher indicate hazardous or harmful alcohol intake and also possible dependence. Scores are categorized into zones to reflect increasing severity, with zone II reflective of hazardous use, zone III indicative of harmful use, and zone IV warranting full diagnostic evaluation for alcohol use disorder. The study uses the phrase "problematic use" to capture all three of the zones related to a positive AUDIT score.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-health/overview-alcohol-consumption/alcohol-use-disorders>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/in-depth/depression/art-20047725?p=1>.

## **Being Alert to Red Flags**

### **Helping Law Students & Newer Lawyers**

#### **Two valuable resources:**

- Trust your instincts (If you think there is a mental health or substance use problem, there probably is.)
- Oregon Attorney Assistance Program (OAAP) [www.aaap.org](http://www.aaap.org).

#### **Some basics red flags – suggesting possible mental health/substance use problems:**

- Continuation of problematic behaviors despite adverse consequences;
- Legal problems (e.g., DUIs) related to substance use;
- Isolation and/or reclusive behavior – especially if not have family/social support systems;
- Social or interpersonal problems (e.g., domestic troubles);
- High-risk behavior (e.g., driving at high speeds; driving while intoxicated);
- Neglecting major responsibilities (work, school, home, etc.);
- Reports of concern expressed by family, friends, or clients;
- Failure to respond at work to colleagues, opposing counsel, judges, etc.;
- Paralysis (by anxiety, fear, insecurity, etc.) in handling work/personal responsibilities;
- Unresponsiveness, unable to contact - No response to calls, emails, texts, etc.;
- Telephone message box full;
- Stressful personal or family problems;
- Financial difficulties;
- Inappropriate/bizarre behavior;
- Paranoid, exaggerated suspicion or sense of persecution;
- Phone calls, emails, texts at odd hours (e.g., 2 a.m.);
- Email/correspondence not opened, and/or not responded to;
- Procrastination and/or excessively passive behavior;
- Missed appointments; failure to follow through;
- Weak excuses for unavailability or neglectful conduct;
- Pending or potential criminal charges;
- Personal or family history of emotional or behavioral disorders;
- Significantly ill parent, spouse, partner, child, close friend, etc.
- Excessive fear, anger, paranoia, and/or delusional beliefs;

- Low frustration tolerance; highly emotionally reactive;
- Mood changes, extreme highs and lows;
- Difficulty responding to and bouncing back from adverse events;
- Talk/behavior suggesting loss of hope, intent to harm self, or desire to no longer be alive. (See Suicide Prevention info in Appendix) National Institute of Mental Health – Suicide Prevention <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/suicide-prevention/index.shtml>

**Indications of *possible* cognitive issues:**

- Decline in cognitive functioning;
- Decline in personal hygiene or appearance;
- Significant memory problems;
- Confused thinking;
- Difficulty understanding issues/following instructions.

**Some red flags related to *possible* problematic alcohol/drug use:**

- *Any of the above may also indicate a possible substance use problem; when substance use problems exist, they often affect many aspects of a person's behavior.*
- Persistent intentions or unsuccessful attempts to cut down or stop using alcohol/drugs;
- Difficulty controlling use of alcohol/drugs;
- Concerns expressed by family, friends, colleagues;
- High tolerance – having to drink/use *more* to achieve same desired effect;
- Withdrawal symptoms: the physical/psychological effects from stopping use of alcohol (e.g., craving, hand tremors, etc.) or drugs (e.g., depression, anxiety, agitation, etc.).
- Denial – individuals with substance use problems often protect their use by denying any problem exist. (Common denial strategies: *I've never had a DUI; I don't drink in the morning/during the day; I don't drink as much as Bill/Mary; I give up drinking for Lent every year; my practice/business is successful, etc.*)

## Research-Based Well-Being Tools & Techniques

1.	<p><b>Breathing</b> - all sorts of different ways to do this. The most important part is to breathe slowly and deeply. It is the fastest and best way to communicate with the non-verbal part of your brain.</p> <p><a href="http://www.drweil.com/drw/u/ART00521/three-breathing-exercises.html">http://www.drweil.com/drw/u/ART00521/three-breathing-exercises.html</a>  <a href="http://cdn.marksdailyapple.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/NPRDeepBreathing.mp3">http://cdn.marksdailyapple.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/NPRDeepBreathing.mp3</a></p> <p><b>APPS- Breathe2Relax</b></p>
2.	<p><b>Meditation</b> - It rewards your brain and changes your brain's wiring in positive ways that to tend toward contentment.</p> <p><a href="http://braintalks.com/news/2013/04/this-is-your-brain-on-mindfulness/">http://braintalks.com/news/2013/04/this-is-your-brain-on-mindfulness/</a>  <a href="http://palousemindfulness.com/selfguidedMBSR.html">http://palousemindfulness.com/selfguidedMBSR.html</a>  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZljDtHUsR0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZljDtHUsR0</a></p> <p><b>APPS - Insight Meditation Timer, Buddhify, Headspace, Zazn</b></p>
3.	<p><b>Avoid isolation; connect with family and friends</b> - Social connectedness is vitally important. It helps to reduce the effects of stress on brain and body; Good hormones (e.g., oxytocin) are released.</p> <p><a href="http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/stress-management/in-depth/social-support/art-20044445?pg=2">http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/stress-management/in-depth/social-support/art-20044445?pg=2</a></p>
4.	<p><b>Exercise</b> - It's good for your body: it helps reduce stress, combats anxiety &amp; depression and ... it actually improves cognitive functioning, improves memory, and enhances mood. Good hormones (endorphins) are released - aka "the runner's high." <i>Spark: Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain</i>, John Ratey (2013)</p> <p><a href="http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/stress-management/in-depth/exercise-and-stress/art-20044469">http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/stress-management/in-depth/exercise-and-stress/art-20044469</a></p>
5.	<p><b>Take a fun class</b> - Learn something new, exercise the creative side of your brain; have a scheduled time for your class, prepay for it; E.g., Guitar Lessons, Dog Agility Class, Knitting Class, Tai Chi, Toastmasters, Poetry Writing. Something that is new, different, and that you look forward to --- especially with a friend!</p> <p><a href="http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2014/11/06/crafting-knitting.aspx">http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2014/11/06/crafting-knitting.aspx</a>  <a href="http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/mental-downtime/">http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/mental-downtime/</a></p>
6.	<p><b>Volunteer</b> - It lowers stress, contributes to a sense of well-being, and improves physical health as well!</p> <p><a href="http://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/volunteering-may-be-good-for-body-and-mind-201306266428">http://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/volunteering-may-be-good-for-body-and-mind-201306266428</a></p>
7.	<p><b>Power song</b> - Taking breaks is really important for your brain. You can use listening to a song as a meditation or to pump you up! (Choose "We Will Rock You" not "Who Let the Dogs Out.") Join a choir. It does awesome things for you!</p> <p><a href="http://www.cnn.com/2013/04/15/health/brain-music-research/">http://www.cnn.com/2013/04/15/health/brain-music-research/</a>  <a href="http://www.unr.edu/counseling/virtual-relaxation-room/releasing-stress-through-the-power-of-music">http://www.unr.edu/counseling/virtual-relaxation-room/releasing-stress-through-the-power-of-music</a>  <a href="http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/news/10496056/Choir-singing-boosts-your-mental-health.html">http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/news/10496056/Choir-singing-boosts-your-mental-health.html</a></p>

8.	<p><b>Humor-break</b> - Breaks are vitally important and if you can combine that with some laughter, you have provided your body and your brain with some much needed feel-good time. Laughing stimulates many organs, activates your stress response and then relaxes your body systems. Laughing also strengthens your immune system.</p> <p><a href="http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044456">http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044456</a>  <a href="http://www.healthsystem.virginia.edu/pub/feap/work-life/newsletters/Humor%20and%20Stress.pdf">http://www.healthsystem.virginia.edu/pub/feap/work-life/newsletters/Humor%20and%20Stress.pdf</a></p>
9.	<p><b>Spirituality, religion, and connecting with nature</b> - Spirituality, organized religion, or just communing with nature can help to foster a sense of meaning and purpose (and offer perspective when you are highly stressed). Being in nature or at least looking out a window at some nature is great for your brain. Light increases serotonin – one of our neurochemicals that helps mood and fights depression. Benefits of being outside: increased attention, focus, &amp; memory; lower stress, and reduced brain fatigue.</p> <p><a href="http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044464">http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044464</a></p>
10.	<p><b>Pets</b> – if you have pets, try to maximize your interactions with them; this increases our feel good hormones, lowers stress levels, and lowers blood pressure. If you don't have pets, you can volunteer to walk dogs at the Humane Society or go visit someplace with a fish tank!</p> <p><a href="http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/education/story/2012-05-13/dogs-stress-relief-on-campus/54921444/1">http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/education/story/2012-05-13/dogs-stress-relief-on-campus/54921444/1</a>  <a href="http://hyper.ahajournals.org/content/38/4/815.full">http://hyper.ahajournals.org/content/38/4/815.full</a></p>
11.	<p><b>Commitment &amp; accountability</b> – We are more likely to do pretty much everything if we have another person we feel accountable to. So, get a gym buddy, a walking or running partner, a meditation buddy, a movie break buddy. You get the point!</p> <p><b>APPS-</b> <a href="https://www.stickk.com/">https://www.stickk.com/</a></p>
12.	<p><b>Group/Social Activity</b> – Same idea as above, but this can facilitate social connections. Double Advantage: great camaraderie in joining others for coffee, lunch, or dinner.</p> <p><a href="http://news.wustl.edu/news/Pages/5642.aspx">http://news.wustl.edu/news/Pages/5642.aspx</a></p>
13.	<p><b>Intimacy</b> – Healthy intimate relationships can be a huge source of support in high stress times; physical contact with other people (even something as simple as a hug or a pat) releases oxytocin in our brains (that's good) and reduces stress and anxiety (that's also good).</p> <p><a href="http://www.lcsun-news.com/las_cruces-healthy_u/ci_25048767/power-touch-mdash-intimacy-has-health-benefits-all">http://www.lcsun-news.com/las_cruces-healthy_u/ci_25048767/power-touch-mdash-intimacy-has-health-benefits-all</a></p>
14.	<p><b>Gratitude</b> – It's good for our well-being to make a practice of appreciation. It is also a state of being that increases our social connections.</p> <p><a href="http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/pdfs/GratitudePDFs/2Wood-GratitudeWell-BeingReview.pdf">http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/pdfs/GratitudePDFs/2Wood-GratitudeWell-BeingReview.pdf</a>  <a href="http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_gratitude_can_help_you_through_hard_times">http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_gratitude_can_help_you_through_hard_times</a></p>

15.	<p><b>Savoring practice</b> – Our brain has a <i>negativity bias</i>. Bad experiences stick in our memories while positive experiences flow through like water through a sieve. You can shift your brain toward positivity by savoring a positive moment for just 10-30 seconds. This attention to the positive cements those moments in our memories just like the negative moments.</p> <p><a href="http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/10_steps_to_savoring_the_good_things_in_life">http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/10_steps_to_savoring_the_good_things_in_life</a></p>
16.	<p><b>Diet</b> – Quick Tips: 1) Hunger hurts Concentration → eat breakfast (oatmeal is a natural brain food); 2) Good Foods = Alertness → spinach, broccoli, &amp; beans are great alertness foods; 3) Good Glucose = Good Memory → complex carbs (e.g., green veggies, whole grains, beans, lentils, peas &amp; potatoes) provide steady source of glucose, avoiding sugar spikes. Comfort foods (chips, candy bars, pastries) work ok in the moment, but can cause blood-sugar fluctuations that can increase stress and mood swings.</p> <p><a href="http://www.helpguide.org/articles/diet-weight-loss/emotional-eating.htm">http://www.helpguide.org/articles/diet-weight-loss/emotional-eating.htm</a>  <a href="http://www.webmd.com/food-recipes/healthy-foods-eat-brain-power">http://www.webmd.com/food-recipes/healthy-foods-eat-brain-power</a>  <a href="https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-science-willpower/201111/stress-sugar-and-self-control">https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-science-willpower/201111/stress-sugar-and-self-control</a></p>
17.	<p><b>Sleep</b> – Sleep deprivation and elevated stress hormones tend to be related. Healthy Tips: Stick to a sleep schedule, develop a relaxing pre-bedtime ritual, exercise daily, avoid alcohol/drugs, tobacco, caffeine, and heavy meals before bedtime; have a bedroom that is cool, quiet, and dark. Sweet Dreams!</p> <p><a href="http://sleepfoundation.org/">http://sleepfoundation.org/</a>  <a href="http://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/guide/tips-reduce-stress">http://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/guide/tips-reduce-stress;</a>  <a href="http://consumer.healthday.com/encyclopedia/stress-management-37/stress-health-news-640/sleep-deprivation-and-stress-646063.html">http://consumer.healthday.com/encyclopedia/stress-management-37/stress-health-news-640/sleep-deprivation-and-stress-646063.html</a></p>
18.	<p><b>Self-Awareness</b> – Our daily lives are filled with innumerable things, people, obligations, schedules, and responsibilities competing for our attention, many of which are among the normal stresses of a law office environment. Practicing self-awareness simply means stopping and taking time to inwardly reflect on ourselves and what is going on within us in the present moment. For example, are we angry, tired, anxious, fearful, or sad, etc.? When we practice self-awareness, in a compassionate, non-self-blaming way, we are more likely to avoid unwanted stress-induced behaviors and reactions, more likely to regulate our emotions in a healthy way, and more likely to develop an understanding of ourselves and our thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Meditation, mindfulness, yoga, journaling, and Tai-Chi are practices that people often use to increase their self-awareness.</p> <p><a href="http://www.rebeccaanhalt.com/self-awareness-and-stress-relief/">http://www.rebeccaanhalt.com/self-awareness-and-stress-relief/</a>  <a href="http://www.turn-stress-into-bliss.com/self-awareness-exercises">http://www.turn-stress-into-bliss.com/self-awareness-exercises</a>  <a href="http://www.thepracticingmind.com/author/chelsea15">http://www.thepracticingmind.com/author/chelsea15</a></p>
19.	<p><b>Listen to your body</b> -- Do a <i>self-care body scan</i>: check in with yourself. Are you experiencing any aches, pains, or other discomfort? If so, your body may be telling you something like: get some exercise, eat something, cut down on the caffeine, take a time-out, or call a friend? Listen to your body!</p> <p><a href="http://www.mindful.org/the-body-scan-practice/">http://www.mindful.org/the-body-scan-practice/</a></p>

20.	<p><b>Structure and schedules</b> – Develop regular daily habits and routines for activities that are repetitive (e.g., going to bed, getting up in morning; work times, meal times, social times, self-care times, zoning out times, etc.). Perhaps even keep a simple log, journal, or calendar to record your success in maintaining your schedule and routine; for some, a visual track record of accomplishments tends to reinforce success.</p> <p>Having a regular daily schedule reduces the need to make minor or routine decisions and choices. This practice: (1) eliminates needless decision-making, preserving the brain’s energy for higher level tasks; (2) creates a sense of control &amp; empowerment; (3) Encourages planning one’s day; (4) Encourages the creation of healthy self-care habits, like exercising and visiting with family and friends.</p> <p><a href="http://www.rebeccaanhalt.com/schedule-more-and-stress-less/">http://www.rebeccaanhalt.com/schedule-more-and-stress-less/</a></p>
21.	<p><b>To-Do Lists can be Two-Edged Swords</b> – For some To-Do Lists are helpful and stress-relieving, for others they are stress-producing. The longer the list, the less likely you are to get things done. If you make a To-Do List, keep it simple and relatively short (eliminate low-priority items), and don’t jump from one task to another – try to complete one item at a time. If you really like lists, consider including a Done List at the end of the day to celebrate your accomplishments. All lists of things to do should include one or more healthy self-care activities.</p> <p><a href="http://www.jillkonrath.com/sales-blog/quickly-reduce-your-to-do-list">http://www.jillkonrath.com/sales-blog/quickly-reduce-your-to-do-list</a></p>
22.	<p><b>Avoid relationship drama</b> – If you have personal relationships that are occasionally volatile, respectfully inform the other person that all your energies right now must be focused on your studies and self-care and you will not engage in any relationship drama – and stick to this rule. This is called <i>maintaining healthy boundaries!</i></p> <p><a href="http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jennifer-twardowski/6-steps-to-setting-boundaries-in-relationships_b_6142248.html">http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jennifer-twardowski/6-steps-to-setting-boundaries-in-relationships_b_6142248.html</a></p>
23.	<p><b>Inspirational reading, dream, imagine, visualize success</b> – Help your brain by doing things that encourage positive thinking.</p> <p><a href="http://www.wisebrain.org/TakingintheGood.pdf">http://www.wisebrain.org/TakingintheGood.pdf</a></p>
24.	<p><b>Do something you love</b> – If there is an activity that you enjoy doing right now, make sure you do not lose that as part of your proactive self-care study strategy.</p> <p><a href="http://www.sparkpeople.com/resource/wellness_articles.asp?id=1657">http://www.sparkpeople.com/resource/wellness_articles.asp?id=1657</a>  <a href="http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/a_better_way_to_pursue_happiness">http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/a_better_way_to_pursue_happiness</a></p>
25.	<p><b>Reach out for help: OAAP</b> – If you have questions, concerns, or simply need to talk with someone, call or contact OAAP @ <a href="http://www.oaap.org">www.oaap.org</a>; 503-226-1057.</p>

## Signs and Symptoms

The behaviors listed below *may* be signs that someone is thinking about suicide.

- Talking about wanting to die or wanting to kill themselves
- Talking about feeling empty, hopeless, or having no reason to live
- Making a plan or looking for a way to kill themselves, such as searching for lethal methods online, stockpiling pills, or buying a gun
- Talking about great guilt or shame
- Talking about feeling trapped or feeling that there are no solutions
- Feeling unbearable pain (emotional pain or physical pain)
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Using alcohol or drugs more often
- Acting anxious or agitated
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Changing eating and/or sleeping habits
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Taking great risks that could lead to death, such as driving extremely fast
- Talking or thinking about death often
- Displaying extreme mood swings, suddenly changing from very sad to very calm or happy
- Giving away important possessions
- Saying goodbye to friends and family
- Putting affairs in order, making a will

**If these warning signs apply to you or someone you know, get help as soon as possible, particularly if the behavior is new or has increased recently.**

## Risk Factors

Suicide does not discriminate. People of all genders, ages, and ethnicities can be at risk. Suicidal behavior is complex, and there is no single cause. Many different factors contribute to someone making a suicide attempt. But people most at risk tend to share specific characteristics. The main risk factors for suicide are:

- Depression, other mental disorders, or substance abuse disorder
- Certain medical conditions
- Chronic pain
- A prior suicide attempt
- Family history of a mental disorder or substance abuse
- Family history of suicide
- Family violence, including physical or sexual abuse



- Having guns or other firearms in the home
- Having recently been released from prison or jail
- Being exposed to others' suicidal behavior, such as that of family members, peers, or celebrities

Many people have some of these risk factors but do not attempt suicide. It is important to note that suicide is not a normal response to stress. **Suicidal thoughts or actions are a sign of extreme distress, not a harmless bid for attention, and should not be ignored.**

Often, family and friends are the first to recognize the [warning signs of suicide](#) and can be the first step toward helping an at-risk individual find treatment with someone who specializes in diagnosing and treating mental health conditions. See the resources on NIMH's [Find Help for Mental Illnesses](#) page if you're not sure where to start.

Suicide is complex. Treatments and therapies for people with suicidal thoughts or actions will vary with age, gender, physical and mental well-being, and with individual experiences. NIMH has focused research on identifying people at risk for suicide and identifying effective interventions.

**5 Action Steps for Helping Someone in Emotional Pain**

<p><b>ASK</b></p> <p>"Are you thinking about killing yourself?"</p>	<p><b>KEEP THEM SAFE</b></p> <p>Reduce access to lethal items or places.</p>	<p><b>BE THERE</b></p> <p>Listen carefully and acknowledge their feelings.</p>	<p><b>HELP THEM CONNECT</b></p> <p>Save the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number 1-800-273-8255.</p>	<p><b>STAY CONNECTED</b></p> <p>Follow up and stay in touch after a crisis.</p>
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National Institute of Mental Health
 [www.nimh.nih.gov/suicideprevention](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/suicideprevention)

1. **ASK:** "Are you thinking about killing yourself?" It's not an easy question, but studies show that [asking at-risk individuals](#) if they are suicidal does not increase suicides or suicidal thoughts.
2. **KEEP THEM SAFE:** Reducing a suicidal person's access to highly lethal items or places is an important part of suicide prevention. While this is not always easy, asking if the at-risk person has a plan and removing or disabling the lethal means can make a difference.
3. **BE THERE:** Listen carefully and learn what the individual is thinking and feeling. Research suggests [acknowledging and talking about suicide](#) may [reduce rather than increase](#) suicidal thoughts.
4. **HELP THEM CONNECT:** Save the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline's **(1-800-273-TALK (8255))** and the Crisis Text Line's number **(741741)** in your phone, so it's there when you

need it. You can also help make a connection with a trusted individual like a family member, friend, spiritual advisor, or mental health professional.

5. **STAY CONNECTED:** Staying in touch after a crisis or after being discharged from care can make a difference. [Studies have shown](#) the number of suicide deaths goes down when someone follows up with the at-risk person.

### **Biographies**

**Shari R. Pearlman, LCSW, JD** has worked at the Oregon Attorney Assistance Program (OAAP) over 20 years. Shari is a graduate of Wurzweiler School of Social Work (MSW 1987) and Rutgers School of Law (JD 1992,) and received her Certificate of Business Management from Portland State University (2003), and her license in clinical social work (2010). She is experienced in career and life transition counseling, mental health and trauma counseling, crisis intervention, alcohol and substance misuse counseling and relationship counseling. Shari often assists attorneys create healthier work and life styles. She worked in indigent criminal defense here in Portland for four years before joining the OAAP staff in 1999. Shari was the OAAP Liaison to the OSB Advisory Committee on Diversity and Inclusion, and served on the boards of the Oregon Women Lawyers, Queen’s Bench and the OSB Diversity Section Executive Board. Shari has a passion for helping people and building community.

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