

Lawyer Assistance Program

The Lawyer Assistance Program (LAP) of the New York State Bar Association was established in 1990 to assist attorneys, judges, and law school students who are affected by alcoholism, drug abuse, stress, depression, and other mental health issues. LAP also provides support services to families, law firms and others in the legal community who are concerned about mental health issues among attorneys.

Judges' Assistance Program

Specialized help is available for members of the judiciary. The purpose of the Judges' Assistance Program of the New York State Bar Association is to assist judges who are affected by alcoholism, drug abuse, stress, depression or other mental health issues. The goal of the Judges' Assistance Program is to prevent health-related, personal or professional problems.

Available Services

- Early identification of impairment
- Intervention and motivation to seek help
- Assessment, evaluation and development of an appropriate treatment plan
- Referral to community resources, self-help groups, inpatient treatment, outpatient counseling, and rehabilitation services
- Referral to a trained peer assistant – attorneys who have faced their own difficulties and volunteer to assist a struggling colleague by providing support, understanding, guidance, and good listening
- Information and consultation for those concerned about an attorney
- Training programs on recognizing, preventing, and dealing with addiction, stress, depression, and other mental health issues

Seeking assistance is voluntary and confidential.

LAP is available to all attorneys in New York State and their immediate family members, whether or not the attorney is a member of the New York State Bar Association.

Assistance Resources Lawyer Assistance Programs

Patricia Spataro, Director 1.800.255.0569
NYSBA LAP or 518.487.5685

Eileen Travis, Director 212.302.5787
New York City LAP

Nassau County LAP 888.408.6222

Judiciary Law

Section 499. Lawyer Assistance Committees Chapter 327 of the Laws of 1993

1. Confidential information privileged. The confidential relations and communications between a member or authorized agent of a lawyer assistance committee sponsored by a state or local bar association and any person, firm or corporation communicating with such a committee, its members or authorized agents shall be deemed to be privileged on the same basis as those provided by law between attorney and client. Such privileges may be waived only by the person, firm or corporation, which has furnished information to the committee.

2. Immunity from liability. Any person, firm or corporation in good faith providing information to, or in any other way participating in the affairs of any of the committees referred to in subdivision one of this section shall be immune from civil liability that might otherwise result by reason of such conduct. For the purpose of any proceeding, the good faith of any such person, firm or corporation shall be presumed.

Confidential Help for the Problems Lawyers, Judges and Law Students Face

drinking problems
gambling
stress
drug abuse
mental health issues
depression



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LAWYER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

1.800.255.0569

All LAP services are confidential and protected under Section 499 of the Judiciary Law as amended by Chapter 327 of the Laws of 1993.



Personal Inventory

Personal problems such as addiction and mental health concerns affect a professional's ability to practice law. Review the following questions. If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, you may benefit by calling LAP.

1. Are important people in my life saying that my behavior has changed or that I seem different?
2. Is it difficult for me to maintain a routine and stay on top of responsibilities?
3. Have I experienced memory problems or an inability to concentrate?
4. Am I having difficulty managing emotions such as anger and sadness?
5. Have I missed appointments or appearances or failed to return phone calls or emails?
6. Have my sleeping and eating habits changed?
7. Am I experiencing a pattern of relationship problems with significant people in my life?
8. Does my family have a history of alcoholism, substance abuse or depression?
9. Do I drink or take drugs to deal with my problems?
10. Recently, have I had more drinks or drugs than I intended, or felt that I should cut back or quit, but could not?
11. Is gambling making me careless of my financial responsibilities?
12. Do I feel so stressed, burned out and depressed that I have thoughts of suicide?

Addiction and Alcoholism:

- Alcoholism and drug abuse are treatable.
- Addiction is characterized by a preoccupation with the substance and a loss of control over consumption.
- Addiction is a progressive disease; without treatment it only gets worse.
- Statistics indicate that 15-18% of lawyers become alcoholics.
- Prescription drug abuse happens whenever drugs are used in ways other than prescribed.

Depression:

- Is a serious medical condition in which a person feels sad, hopeless and is unable to live normally.
- Symptoms include persistent sadness, irritability, loss of concentration, unexplained physical pain, and an inability to enjoy life.
- Depression is a treatable illness.
- Statistics indicate attorneys suffer from depression at a higher rate than other professionals.

Suicide:

- Stress and mental health problems can cause a person to have thoughts of suicide. Call **1.800.273.8255** if you or someone you know is thinking about suicide.

Stress:

- Stress creates mental, social, and physical problems.
- Symptoms can include fatigue, changes in appetite, headaches, crying, and changes in sleep habits.
- Unmanaged stress can lead to serious physical and psychological problems.
- Unmanaged stress is linked to alcoholism, substance abuse, and depression.
- There are many positive ways to manage stress.

Doing Nothing is not an Option

For lawyers and judges the risks of untreated mental health issues are high due to the stress and demands of practicing law. And the consequences to your personal life and your professional career can be serious.

The profession demands that you represent your clients competently. This is difficult to do when you are suffering from a drinking problem, drug abuse, depression, stress or any mental health concern. These issues can all be successfully treated.

There are many things that stand in the way of a lawyer or judge asking for help. First and foremost, there is denial. Denial prevents someone from asking for help until the ramifications become so dire that ignoring them is no longer possible. Obstacles to seeking help also include shame and stigma both of which, when partnered with denial, can cause an unnecessary pain, suffering and serious consequences.

It becomes an ethical obligation for lawyers and judges to get help when problems arise. The Lawyer Assistance Program has been around for 25 years and is dedicated to providing competent, compassionate, confidential assistance. We believe that we make it doable for a lawyer, judge or law student to take that important first step and ask for help.



resources, compassion, help, support, hope, referrals