



# Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program

**SERVICES FOR LAW STUDENTS**

800-343-8527

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## THE CHALLENGES OF LAW SCHOOL:

Being in law school is an exciting time. You are in the midst of an intellectually stimulating environment, you are getting to know other like-minded students who share your interests, you have the opportunity to network with top rated faculty and esteemed scholars in the field, you are training to be part of one of the original helping professions and you have myriad opportunities for finding meaning and success in your chosen career. And yet, during your time at law school, there may be some bumps in the road, including...

**Heavy workload**—The volume and intensity of law school curriculum is far greater than undergraduate programs. As a general rule, 4 hours of preparation time for each hour in class is not unexpected. That means that a 15 hour semester course load can require up to 60 hours of study time each week outside of class.

**High expectations**— All of you are quite accomplished and successful undergraduate students. Most of you expect to continue to be at the top of your class and may expect things to come to you quite easily. This may not be the case in law school. Law school will provide you with intellectual challenges and opportunities for growth heretofore not experienced.

**Competition**— Competition for success, recognition and high grades are realities of law school. Keeping up with assignments, responding competently, if not eloquently, in class, participating in law school academic and advocacy extra curricular activities and, yes, high performance on exams become important. Both students and employers put great stock in a law students class standing or a GPA and yet everyone knows that the top 10% of the class is a status only available to 10% of the class.

**Fear of failure**— Fear of failure. Fear of success. Performance anxiety. Fear of public speaking. Some of these are motivating; some may be debilitating.

**Outside pressures and expectations**— Your personal life, family and other enjoyable activities do not go away when you enter law school. Keeping up with that life is as important as, if not more important, than law school.

**Debt**— Law school is still a good investment. However, the cost of tuition is high. According to the National Association for Law School Placement (NALP) in 2002, 94% of survey respondents borrowed money to go to law school and more than half of these respondents also carried forward additional debt from their undergraduate education. In 2002, it was estimated that the **median** amount borrowed by a private law school graduate was \$70,147 and the **median** amount borrowed by public law school graduates was \$46,499. These figures keep rising. That kind of debt can be frightening to acquire and difficult to manage.

## AS IF THESE CHALLENGES WEREN'T ENOUGH: MORE STRAIGHT TALK FOR LAW STUDENTS

- 30% of law students report they have abused alcohol.
- 9% of law students report use of illegal substances, including marijuana and cocaine.
- 12% of students begin abusing substances in law school.
- 17– 40% of law students suffer from depression.
- Self reports of anxiety and depression are significantly higher among law students than either the general population or medical students.
- Anecdotal reports from Texas law schools indicate that abuse of prescription drugs as study aids and/or party drugs, is prevalent.

## SOLUTIONS:

### MAINTAINING BALANCE

Maintaining a balance between a fulfilling personal and social life and a successful professional life is important. Keep in mind that balance is part of a process, not an event. Stay connected to yourself and the things that matter to you. Stay connected to those in your life who support you and help you have a healthy lifestyle. Remember that your personal values, preferences, and feelings are an important part of who you are—even as you learn to think like a lawyer. Above all, use this time to try new things, combine theory with practice, and identify or strengthen your core values in all areas of your life.

### A SAFE PLACE TO TURN: THE TEXAS LAWYERS' ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (TLAP)

Many law students strive for success and balance in school and in their personal lives. Many achieve this. Sometimes, however, individuals get stuck and fall into self-defeating behaviors. Moderate levels of stress have a positive impact on performance but excessive and prolonged stress negatively impacts performance. All in all, it's not easy to achieve balance and perspective when one is caught up in the rhythm of reading, study, classes, study groups, with little sleep, lots of stress, and the persistent feeling that there is never enough time to do everything. It may be tempting to turn to drinking, drug use and partying to relieve the tensions. It may also be tempting to isolate and focus only on your studies or work and leave no time for play. Extremes either way can lead to problems.

The solution to all these law school challenges is to take care of yourself. But what if you don't or can't or find it all suddenly unmanageable? If you do develop problems, we think that the responsible thing to do is to stop, assess the situation, change course and, if necessary, seek help. The Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program (TLAP) is a safe place to turn for assistance in this process. TLAP is a program of the State Bar of Texas that offers confidential crisis counseling and referral services to lawyers, judges and law students who are challenged by substance use and other mental health disorders, such as depression, anxiety, stress and similar conditions. Since 1989, TLAP has provided confidential assistance to the legal community. Although you are not a lawyer yet, you are still a member of the legal community.

TLAP services for law students include:

- Crisis counseling
- Referrals to local professional resources, including therapists, doctors, treatment centers and other providers
- Peer contact and peer assistance from local volunteers
- Local attorney and law student support groups
- Referrals to facilitated groups for depression and mood disorders
- Access to confidential list-serve for law students in recovery from substance use disorders
- Confidential support for students facing inquiry by the Board of Law Examiners due to disclosures related to mental health or substance use disorders.
- Educational seminars, presentations, and CLE upon request

All communications with TLAP are held in strict confidence and in accordance with the provisions of the Texas Health and Safety Code, Chapter 467.

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## STRESS MANAGEMENT FOR LAW STUDENTS:

Whether you call it “stressed out,” “overwhelmed,” or just “a little crispy around the edges,” when the stress gets to be too much, you may find yourself in distress. You’re tired, you’re tense, you’re irritable, you’re restless, and you’re discontented. Sound familiar? We all get there, and unfortunately, some of us stay there. There are, though, some things you can do to reduce the stress response in your life and keep you on the healthy side of stress. The following are some suggestions that take very little time and tend to be quite effective:

### THE SEVENTH INNING STRETCH:

This technique is designed to help you relieve the muscular tension that comes with stress. Reduce the muscular tension and the mind will follow. This technique is made up of five muscle stretches you can do just about anywhere, anytime:

Sit up straight on the front edge of your chair with both feet on the floor. Rest your hands on your knees. Close your eyes and take two deep abdominal breaths. When you breathe, your abdomen should rise and fall, but not your shoulders. This is called abdominal breathing. It is deeper and more relaxing than shallow chest breathing. Open your eyes, and begin with the first stretch. While stretching each group of muscles, concentrate on the stretching and release of the muscles while still relaxing the rest of your body. Breathe through each stretch, holding each stretch for about three complete abdominal breaths. Between each breath, consciously relax your body for two complete breaths.

If you experience any discomfort or pain at any time during any of these stretches, discontinue the stretching and focus on relaxing the muscle.

1. With your hands still resting on your knees, let your head easily and slowly drop forward, resting your chin on your chest, and hold this stretch. Slowly and easily roll your head to the left, stretching your left ear down toward your left shoulder and hold. Then slowly and easily roll your head back with your face turned to the ceiling and hold. Slowly and easily roll your head to the right, stretching your right ear down to your shoulder and hold. Return your head to its normal position and take two deep breaths.
2. Join your hands together behind your lower back, entwining your fingers. Gently try to squeeze your shoulder blades together and hold for three breaths. Repeat.
3. Raise your arms over your head and entwine your fingers. Slowly and easily bend to the left, sideways at the waist, until you feel the pull of the stretch. Hold for three breaths and return to your normal position. Repeat to the right.
4. Carefully place your left ankle on top of your right knee. With your left arm draped across your leg (elbow on your left knee, hand on your left ankle) and your right hand resting on your left foot, lean forward slightly until you feel the stretch in your back and legs. Hold for three breaths and then repeat with the right ankle on the left knee.
5. Extend your feet out in front of you with your knees slightly bent. Inhale deeply, and on the exhalation, slowly bend forward from the waist and reach your hands toward your ankles. Only go forward as far as is comfortable and rest your hands on your legs at that location. Hold for three breaths.

#### MEDITATION FOR THE BUSY LAW STUDENT:

Often, when we are stressed, we tend to lose touch with the “here and now.” We even tend to lose touch with our body. Designed to be done anywhere, anytime, the *Meditation for the Busy Law Student* can help you refocus your attention, however briefly, on the present and thus, to refocus your energy and concentration on the issues at hand.

You can practice this technique with eyes open or closed (although it is easier with eyes closed).

First, direct your attention to the soles of your feet and try to feel the floor through your shoes. This reconnects you with your body and brings your thoughts “back down to earth.”

After a couple of seconds, bring your attention to your breath. Again, consciously use the abdominal breath and focus your attention on trying to feel your breath as it flows through your nose and hits the back of your throat. It will feel cool on the inhalation and warmer on the exhale.

Perform as many times as you can, bringing your attention back to the breath whenever it strays. Although you can use this technique even in the middle of a conversation, if you will try this twice a day for about 10 to 15 minutes each time in a quiet place, you will find that your mental energy and concentration overall is greatly improved.

#### DEEP RELAXATION:

Obviously, when we are stressed, one of the first things we do is tense up physically. Unfortunately, as goes the body, so goes the mind (and vice versa). So, when we are tense physically, we will tend to be more mentally tense. This generally makes us more irritable and we find it more difficult to focus and concentrate. The Deep Relaxation technique is designed to give you a few moments respite from that tension, ease some of the attendant pain, and refocus your energy.

Find a quiet place where you can remain uninterrupted for at least 15 minutes. Sit or lie down. Close your eyes.

Take three deep abdominal breaths through your nose. In your imagination, concentrate on your feet and ankles. As you continue to breathe, imagine your breath flowing down your body and into your feet, bringing warmth and relaxation to your feet. Continue concentrating on your feet for three breaths, each time relaxing your feet a little more.

With each set of three breaths, move up your legs, into your torso, your back, your shoulders, your arms, your hands, your neck, your face, and finally the top of your head. If you come to a muscle that is particularly tense, spend a couple of extra breaths releasing the tension.

At the end, breath deeply again for three breaths and enjoy a moment of relaxation.