



## Lawyer Wellness PROGRAM

# Managing Depression in the Legal Profession

*Depression affects an estimated 20 million Americans in a given year.*

One in five will experience depression at some point in their lifetime. Depression can affect anyone — even a person who appears to live in relatively ideal circumstances — even a lawyer.

Depression, left untreated, may have a significant impact on work performance. It contributes to presenteeism, or someone “present” at work but not engaged and absenteeism, or missing work. It may also adversely impact multiple areas of performance, including focus and decision making, time management, social interactions, and communication, each a vital skill for lawyers. It is estimated that eight hours of productivity per week is lost for those struggling with depression. Like most other health conditions, early detection, and effective treatment lessen the severity and impact of the condition. In over 80% of cases, treatment is effective.

*Lawyers suffer from depression at a rate much higher than the general population.*

A 2016 study of nearly 13,000 practicing lawyers found **28 percent** of those surveyed reported a problem with depression within the past 12 months, a rate four times of that found in the general population. A staggering **46 percent** divulged they had experienced depression at some point over the course of their legal careers.

Sadly, lawyers reported suicidal ideation at a rate five times that found in the general population.

**1 in 3** lawyers reported experiencing depression within the past year.



### *Do you have depression?*

If you have five or more of the following symptoms nearly every day for two weeks, then you may have Major Depression. If you have fewer symptoms, you may have low-level depression.

### *Symptoms of Depression*

- Depressed mood, such as feeling sad or empty or even constantly irritable
- Decreased interest or pleasure in all – or almost all – activities
- Significant (and unintentional) weight loss, weight gain, or decrease or increase in appetite
- Insomnia or increased desire to sleep
- Either restlessness or slowed behavior that can be observed by others
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness, or excessive or inappropriate guilt
- Trouble thinking, concentrating or making decisions
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide

Too many lawyers do not get help because of the stigma sometimes associated with depression or fear that disclosure might harm their careers.

The reality is that depression is an illness that needs professional intervention. It is nothing to be ashamed about. It's difficult for a lawyer to recover on their own. They'll need a support network to help them on their journey towards recovery and to stay well. To be a successful lawyer, you must be a healthy one.



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### Take Steps to Improve your Mental Health

What can you do if you struggle with depression? In addition to seeing your doctor or a mental health expert to be evaluated, you can practice good mental health self-management to improve your symptoms. And finally, you can avail yourself of the numerous resources available to lawyers in need of help.

#### 10 Depression Self-Management Tips

- 1. Build a Support Network**  
Socialize with other lawyers and your friends and family
- 2. Reduce Your Stress**  
Make sure you exercise. Even a five-minute walk will help
- 3. Improve Your Sleep Hygiene**  
Get 7-8 hours a night. Limit caffeine intake
- 4. Improve Your Eating Habits**  
Stay away from sugar and carbs
- 5. Learn How to Combat Negative Thoughts**  
Be more constructive and positive
- 6. Confront Procrastination**  
Do important things first. Prioritize.
- 7. Practice Gratefulness**  
Regularly remember goodness you've received from others
- 8. Find Meaning and Purpose**  
Keep your life in line with your personal values
- 9. Practice Deep Breathing**  
Breathe from deep in your lungs
- 10. Practice Mindfulness Meditation**  
Learn to center yourself



### Mental Health Resources

#### Personal Support

- **Daniel T. Lukasik, Esq.**  
UCS Judicial Wellness Coordinator\*  
Cell (716) 913-6309  
[dlukasik@nycourts.gov](mailto:dlukasik@nycourts.gov)
- **NYSBA Judicial Wellness Committee**

#### Books

- *Undoing Depression: What Therapy Can't Teach You and Medication Can't Give You*  
by Richard O'Connor, Ph.D.
- *The 10 Best-Ever Depression Management Techniques*  
by Margaret Wehrenberg, Psy.D.
- *The Mindful Way Through Depression: Freeing Yourself from Chronic Unhappiness*  
by Mark Williams, Ph.D.
- *The Upward Spiral: Using Neuroscience to Reverse the Course of Depression One Small Change at a Time*  
by Alex Korb, Ph.D.
- *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy*  
by David Burns, M.D.

#### Websites

- [Anxiety and Depression Association of America](#)
- [University at Michigan Depression Center](#)
- [Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance](#)
- [Lawyers Depression Project](#)
- [Lawyerswithdepression.com](http://Lawyerswithdepression.com)
- [Lawyerwellbeing.net](http://Lawyerwellbeing.net)