

Unreasonable Demands: An Attorney's Guide to Self-Care and Managing Stress



Marsha D. Brown, Ph.D.
Institute for Behavioral Sciences and the Law
mdbrown@forensic-experts.net

Overview

Purpose:

- * To assist in identifying, understanding, and addressing some of the effects of stress on psychological well-being, quality of life, and work productivity.
- * To provide participants with tools for coping with stress.
- * To provide participants with ways to determine when it may be time to seek outside assistance for stress-related difficulties.

Objectives

At the completion of this presentation, participants should be able to:

- * Identify the following: signs and symptoms of stress; the impact of stress on a variety of life domains; the connection between stress and a number of mental health issues;
- * Name three strategies for coping with stress
- * Name three indicators that suggest outside assistance may be needed

WHAT DO LAWYERS HAVE TO FEEL STRESSED-OUT ABOUT?



Just Another Day at the Office



What is Stress?

- * A natural reaction
- * Automatic (Autonomic) response
 - * Originally developed for protection from predators and other threats
 - * Fight or Flight
 - * Hormones elevate heart rate, increase blood pressure, boost energy, and prepare you to handle the situation
- * Modern day stressors
 - * Finances, work, illness, deadlines, childcare
- * What causes you stress?
 - * Identification of triggers is critical



Types of Stress

- * Short-lived, minor stress
 - * Ex: stomachache prior to giving presentation
- * Major, acute stress
 - * Ex: fights with significant other, natural disaster
- * Unexpected emotional stresses
 - * Can trigger heart attacks, arrhythmias, sudden death



Chronic Stress

- * Interferes with normal living
- * Long-term impacts
 - * The longer the stress, the worse for mind and body
 - * Worsening of existing health conditions
 - * Disease (due to changes in body and changes in habits)
 - * Job Strain / Dissatisfaction
 - * More difficultly recovering from illness / Lower Immune System Functioning



50 Signs and Symptoms of Stress

1. Headaches, jaw clenching or pain
2. Gritting, grinding teeth
3. Stuttering or stammering
4. Tremors, trembling of lips or hands
5. Neck ache, back pain, muscle spasms
6. Light headedness, faintness, dizziness
7. Ringing, buzzing or popping sounds
8. Frequent blushing, sweating
9. Cold or sweaty hands or feet
10. Dry mouth, problems swallowing
11. Frequent colds, infections
12. Rashes, itching, hives
13. Frequent unexplained “allergy” attacks
14. Heartburn, stomach pain, nausea
15. Excess belching, flatulence
16. Constipation, diarrhea
17. Difficulty breathing, frequent sighing
18. Panic attacks
19. Chest pain, palpitations, rapid pulse
20. Frequent urination
21. Poor sexual desire or performance
22. Anxiety, worry, guilt, nervousness
23. Anger, frustration, hostility
24. Depression, mood swings
25. Change in appetite

50 Signs and Symptoms of Stress (cont.)

26. Insomnia, nightmares, disturbing dreams
27. Difficulty concentration, racing thoughts
28. Trouble learning new information
29. Forgetfulness, disorganization, confusion
30. Difficulty making decisions
31. Feeling overloaded or overwhelmed
32. Frequent crying spells, suicidal thoughts
33. Feelings of loneliness or worthlessness
34. Little interest in appearance, punctuality
35. Nervous habits, fidgeting, feet tapping
36. Increased frustration, irritability
37. Overreaction to petty annoyances
38. Increased number of minor accidents
39. Obsessive or compulsive behavior
40. Reduced work efficiency or productivity
41. Lies or excuses to cover up poor work
42. Rapid or mumbled speech
43. Excessive defensiveness or suspiciousness
44. Problems in communication or sharing
45. Social withdrawal, isolation
46. Constant tiredness, weakness, fatigue
47. Frequent use of OTC drugs
48. Change in weight without dieting
49. Increased smoking, alcohol, or drug use
50. Excessive gambling or impulse buying

Impact of Stress

- * Physical
- * Emotional
- * Cognitive
- * Behavioral
- * Interpersonal
- * Work Performance



Physical Effects

- Chills or Sweats
- Thirst
- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Fainting
- Vomiting
- Dizziness
- Chest Pain
- Headaches
- Elevated Blood Pressure
- Muscle Tremors
- Teeth Grinding
- Visual Difficulties
- Weakness
- Sleep Disturbance

Emotional Effects

- Fear
- Guilt
- Grief
- Panic
- Denial
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Emotional Outbursts
- Feeling Overwhelmed
- Loss of Emotional Control
- Feeling vulnerable or helpless
- Agitation
- Irritability

Cognitive Effects

- * Feeling ineffective
- * Dreams/nightmares
- * Intrusive images/thoughts
- * Poor attention and concentration
- * Poor problem solving
- * Memory impairment



Interpersonal Effects

- * Difficulty making decisions
- * Feeling emotionally disconnected
- * Trouble managing boundaries
- * Loss of meaning
- * Sexual dysfunction
- * Dread of working with others
- * Divorce



Behavioral Effects

- * Increase Alcohol Consumption
- * Isolation
- * Risk Taking
- * Increased Startle Response
- * Hypervigilance
- * Appetite Changes
- * Change in Social Activity
- * Marital Difficulties
- * Changes in patterns in work
 - * Over (taking on more hours)
 - * Under (lot of sick days)



Work Performance Effects

- * Low Morale and Motivation
- * Errors in Judgment
- * Co-worker conflict
- * Apathy
- * Absenteeism
- * Inattentiveness
- * Poor Communication



Stressors in the Legal Profession

- * The Adversarial Process
- * Time
- * Preparation
- * Emotional Factors (e.g., victims, spirited advocacy)
- * Identifying with the Parties/Exp. to Traumatic Stimuli
- * Cases Involving Children

Stressors in the Legal Profession

- * Media (e.g., newspapers, television, Internet, blogs)
- * Money/Billable Hours/ Ebbs and Flows of Business
- * Bar Complaints
- * Managing difficult personalities
- * Office conflict

Mental Health

- * Mental Health: Emotional, psychological, and social well-being
- * Mental Illness: “a condition that affects a person's thinking, feeling or mood. Such conditions may affect someone's ability to relate to others and function each day.” (National Alliance on Mental Health; NAMI)

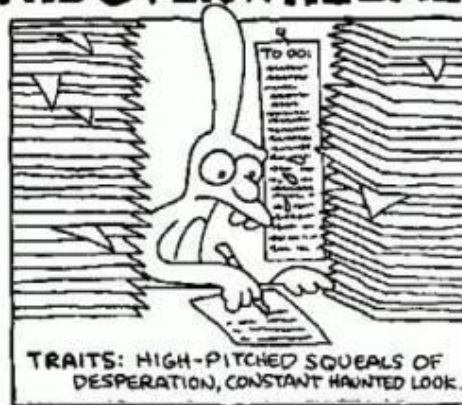
Mental Health and the Legal Profession

- * Attorneys more likely to experience:
 - * Anxiety, depression, psychological distress, and pathological levels of stress
 - * One of the highest suicide rates of professions (CDC)
 - * Vicarious trauma
 - * Begins in law school

Burnout

- * A state of chronic stress and frustration that leads to:
 - * Physical and emotional exhaustion
 - * Feelings of cynicism and detachment
 - * Sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment
- * Results in an inability to successfully function on a personal and professional level

THE OVERWHELMED



Substance Use

Attorneys have high rates of problematic substance use:

- * Likelier to binge drink
- * Higher rates of alcohol-dependent drinking behaviors
- * Begins in law school

Standard Drink Sizes



The percent of "pure" alcohol, expressed here as alcohol by volume (alc/vol), varies by beverage.

When Do We Know It's a Problem?

A problematic pattern of alcohol use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress, as manifested by at least two of the following, occurring within a 12-month period:

- * Larger amounts than intended
- * Desire or unsuccessful efforts to cut down
- * Time spent in activities necessary to get, use, or recover from the effects of alcohol
- * Craving, strong desire, or urge to use alcohol
- * Use resulting in failure to fulfill obligations at work, home, or school
- * Cont'd use despite having problems caused by alcohol use

When Do We Know It's a Problem?

A problematic pattern of alcohol use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress, as manifested by at least two of the following, occurring within a 12-month period:

- * Important social, occupational, or recreational activities are given up/reduced due to alcohol use
- * Recurrent alcohol use in physically hazardous situations
- * Cont'd use despite knowledge of having a persistent or recurrent physical or psychological problem likely to be caused/exacerbated by alcohol
- * Tolerance
- * Withdrawal

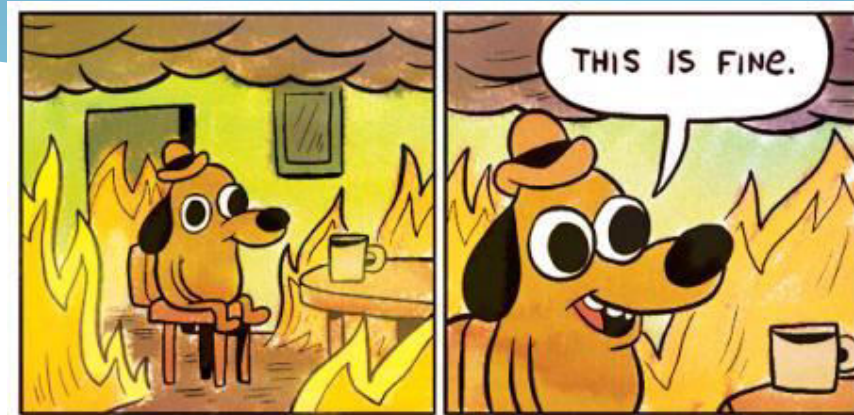
When Do We Know It's a Problem?

A problematic pattern of alcohol use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress, as manifested by at least two of the following, occurring within a 12-month period:

- * Tolerance
 - * Need for increased amounts of alcohol to feel its effects
 - * Diminished effect with use of same amount of alcohol
- * Withdrawal
 - * Physical Symptoms
 - * Alcohol is taken to relieve or avoid withdrawal symptoms

So What Do We Do Now?

Coping Strategies



Work-Related Strategies

- * Say “no” / Set boundaries
- * Take breaks if possible between stressful events
- * Reasonable Scheduling (when possible)
- * Try to reduce take-home work
- * Reinforce effort as well as outcome
- * Develop a support network with other lawyers
- * Socialize outside of professional group
- * Take control back from your electronic devices

What Else Can I Do?

- * Journaling
- * Exercise
- * Read Fiction
- * Take breaks
- * Prioritize tasks
- * Laugh
- * Surround yourself with positive people
- * Schedule time to relax and “me time”
- * Cognitive Reframing
- * Establish work-free zones (automobile, lunch)

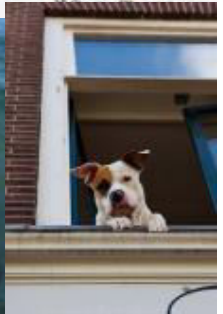
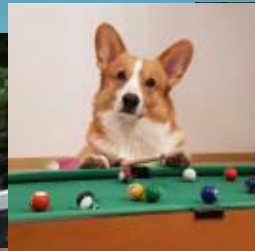


Relaxation Exercises

- * Visualization
- * Deep breathing
- * Massage
- * Meditation
- * Mindfulness
- * Yoga
- * Biofeedback
- * Music and art therapy



What Works for You?



GETTING HELP

When is it time to tell someone?

- * Significant decrease in functioning
- * Loss of control
- * Overreacting to minor situations/annoyances
- * Feeling hopeless or helpless
- * Inability to relax without chemical assistance
- * Feeling at the end of your rope
- * Thoughts of no longer being around

GETTING HELP

- * Psychotherapy (Group, Family, Marital, Individual)
- * Psychiatry
- * Drug / Alcohol Rehabilitation
- * Anger Management
- * Financial / Business Counseling
- * Mentoring
- * Peer Support



HELPING A COLLEAGUE

- * Be supportive
- * Pick a private time in a quiet place away from work
- * Express concerns in a non-accusatory manner
- * Involve others if necessary
- * Suggest solutions (Florida Lawyers Assistance, private practitioners, agencies)
- * Go with them to scheduled appointment
- * Don't dismiss it as temporary or stop trying

Resources

Websites

- * Esperanza: www.hopetocope.com
- * National Alliance on Mental Illness: www.nami.org
- * MH Assoc.: www.mhasefl.org
- * MH America: www.mentalhealthamerica.net
- * American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: www.afsp.org
- * Workplace Mental Health: www.workplacementalhealth.org
- * National Institute of MH: www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml

Additional Resources

- * Florida Lawyers Assistance
- * Free e-book: Overcoming Depression in the Legal Profession (www.lawyerswithdepression.com)
- * National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255

Questions?

