

Stress Management

1 of 1 Handout on Stress Management

Stress Management

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OVERVIEW

- Stress kills.
- Stress is your response to situations in your life.
- You have control over whether you experience stress in life.
- Law school is nothing compared to being a lawyer. You need to have it together because your clients will rely on you. Learn how to manage stress so you can keep it together and be an excellent lawyer.
- In law school, stress can come from many sources, including:
 - Anxiety about being called on in class;
 - The pressure of keeping up with the daily workload;
 - Final exams that count for a student's entire grade;
 - The perceived or real pressure of being compared to classmates;
 - Financial worries, or worries about maintaining a scholarship;
 - Time management concerns, particularly for students juggling jobs and families along with school;
 - Social pressures inherent in being with the same group of people, all day, every day; or
 - Dealing with personal and emotional issues that existed before you started law school.
- A little bit of stress can be productive: it may cause you to get up a little earlier, study a little harder, and pay more attention in class. A lot of stress is usually counterproductive: bad for your health, bad for your overall happiness and, of course, bad for your grades.
- It is normal to be a little nervous about your exams; but being so nervous that you are unable to concentrate on studying or freeze up on the day of the exam is a cause for concern.
- Similarly, law school stress can affect your life outside of law school. Most law students go through brief periods in which they obsess about their schoolwork, snap at friends or family members, or slip up on a non-law school commitment. But if you are beginning to feel out of control, or if the worry about law school is keeping you from functioning either in or out of law school, it is time to seek help.

HOW TO AVOID STRESS

1. Plan Ahead
 - a. Most stressful situations are avoidable
 - b. Stress usually results from poor planning and the decisions you make
 - c. Get help before you need it
 - d. Make a plan and follow it – you have to do the work in the plan
 - e. Don't wait until the last minute to finish your work – pace yourself according to the plan
 - f. Make a To Do List
 - i. Make a list of musts – things you must get done
 - ii. Make a list of likes – things you'd like to get done

- iii. Have separate lists for professional and personal life
 - iv. Calendar in time for tasks and follow that time
 - v. Make a weekly schedule and a semester schedule so you see the big picture of the semester and the little picture for the week
 - g. If you are going to miss class, speak with your professor, turn in assignments early, and ask a classmate to take notes for you
2. Maintain Organization and Order
 - a. The law is all about order and organization – keep your surroundings clear and organized
 - b. There are many organizational tools out there – use them.
 - c. Write everything down – keep an agenda book with dates and times, set-up reminders
 3. Take Care of Yourself
 - a. Get enough sleep
 - b. Eat well
 - c. Drink enough water
 - d. Stay active
 - e. Be kind and forgiving of your mistakes – you are your own worst critic
 - f. If you have a medical or psychological condition – seek treatment, there's no shame in getting help
 4. Find a Friend
 - a. Find one person you trust to vent to during law school. Pick someone who is understanding and calming, not someone who is aggravating and unsympathetic.
 5. Be Nice to Your People
 - a. There is no need to strain the personal relationships in your life because it will cause you more stress when you no longer have their support and have to mend the relationship
 6. Don't Bite off More than You can Chew
 - a. It is not your job to save everybody and not everybody can be saved
 - b. You cannot help anyone on any legal matter because you are not an attorney
 7. Engage in Leisure Time
 - a. At least once a week, spend two to three hours doing something you enjoy that is fun and relaxing

SIGNS YOU ARE STRESSED

Before you can begin dealing with your stress, you must recognize its warning signs. Below, I've divided stress' warning signs into physical, intellectual, behavioral, and emotional signals. Although the lists are quite long, they are by no means all inclusive.

Physical Signals

How Your Body is Functioning

food

- Tension, or migraine, headaches
- Upset stomach, problems retaining

Change in appetite

- Tightness in chest, back, shoulders
- Aching jaw, tight forehead
- Shortness of breath, dizziness
- Excessive sweating
- Sweaty palms
- Tingling sensation in fingers toes

palpitations

- Nervous tension all over; heart

- Diarrhea or constipation
- Constant low grade fever
- Cold, or sore throat
- Rashes, hives, skin irritation
- Increased blood pressure
- Always tired

periods

- Menstrual problems, missed menstrual

Emotional Signals

What You Are Feeling

- Less interest in hobbies, familiar fun activities
- Upset by the unexpected
- Sudden shifts in mood
- Frequent and/or recurring nightmares
- Vague feelings or uneasiness,

Behavioral Signals

What You Are Doing

- Change in eating habits
- Eating more less
- Sleep problems
- Too much, too little
- Difficulty talking to, holding, loved ones
- Isolating self from others
- Staying at home or staying at work
- Complaining more
- Increased use of alcohol, drugs, coffee, tobacco
- Change in general activity level
- Change in sexual activity, either more or less
- Pacing
- Increased nervous habit, such as nail biting or hair twisting
- Loss of temper: yelling, throwing, and kicking
- Increased recklessness, risk-taking
- Bossiness or inflexibility with others
- Grinding teeth
- Stuttering
- Sudden outbursts of crying
- Laughing, or anger

Intellectual Signals

How Your Mind is Functioning

- Having difficulty remembering recent information or details of recent situations
- Less able to make decisions
- Difficulty concentrating
- Attention span shortens
- Feeling confused, especially with familiar

restlessness
overwhelmed
powerlessness, hopelessness
or less
fine
much help or too much time from others

- Feelings of being swamped,
- Feelings of anger, resentment
- Intolerance, irritability with others
- More easily frustrated
- Increased fear of failure
- Feelings of inadequacy,
- Changed interest in sex, either more
- Apathy, general dissatisfaction
- Desire to cry
- Reduced confidence
- Fear that everyone except you is doing

tasks

- Repetitive thoughts
- Continually thinking particular thoughts
- Misunderstanding what others tell you
- Increasingly poor judgment
- Thoughts of escaping, running away
- Racing thoughts
- Unable to slow down thought process
- Loss of objectivity

HOW TO DEAL WITH STRESS

1. DO NOT DO ANY OF THESE:

- a. Abuse substances or drugs – check out the Lawyers’ Assistance Program Hotline for help if you are abusing substances or drugs
- b. Engage in risky behaviors – you will end up regretting it, feeling bad, and this will lead to stress
- c. Take it out on others – loved or not – professional or personal
- d. Nothing – don’t just do nothing
- e. Commit suicide or otherwise hurt yourself – nothing is worth hurting yourself over

2. DO THIS:

- a. **BREATHE** – practicing the breathing exercise we did in class. Sit up straight, place your hands on your lap, close your eyes, breathe in through your nose allowing your diaphragm to fill with air, and exhale through your mouth. Repeat. Repeat. Repeat.
- b. **GET YOUR HEAD STRAIGHT** – attitude is everything. Practice positive self-talk by reminding yourself of all your positive qualities and stellar abilities to succeed.
- c. **PUT EVERYTHING IN PERSPECTIVE** – not very much matters in the big scheme of life – don’t stress out about irrelevant things in life. Imagine the worst-case scenario, realize it is not happening, and then move forward.
- d. **MAKE A PLAN OF ATTACK** – make a plan to overcome the stressful circumstances and attack them.
- e. **GET HELP** – get help from your professor, classmates, and or loved ones. You can’t do it all on your own, there are people in your personal and professional lives that care about you and will help you.

Helpful Resources

General Matters

- Southern University Counseling Center (all concerns)
Phone No.: 225.771.2480
Located next to the Health Center/Infirmary on campus
<http://www.subr.edu/index.cfm/page/33/n/751>

Substance Abuse

- Lawyers' Assistance Program 24-Hour Hotline (substance abuse)
Phone No.: 1.866.354.9334
<http://www.lsba.org/MemberServices/lap.asp?Menu=MS>

Stress Management

- Stress Management from Mind Tools
<http://www.mindtools.com/smpage.html>
- Stress Management for Lawyers: How to Increase Personal & Professional Satisfaction in the Law by Amiram Elwork.
- Little Ways to Keep Calm and Carry On: Twenty Lessons for Managing Worry, Anxiety, and Fear by Mark A. Reinecke.
- Don't Sweat the Small Stuff – and it's all small stuff (Don't Sweat the Small Stuff Series) by Richard Carlson.

Procrastination

- Beat Procrastination: Take Action and Get Things Done Effectively and Immediately (The Warrior Guides) by Haoting Chow.

Punctuality

- Never Be Late Again: 7 Cures for the Punctually Challenged by Diana DeLonzor.

Writer's Block

- The 7 Secrets of the Prolific: The Definitive Guide to Overcoming Procrastination, Perfectionism, and Writer's Block by Hillary Rettig.

Depression & Anxiety

- Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy by David D. Burns, M.D.

Communication

- How to Win Friends & Influence People by Dale Carnegie.

Self-Esteem

- Ten Days to Self-Esteem by David D. Burns, M.D.

Self-Love

- Love Yourself Like Your Life Depends On It by Kamal Ravikant.

Heartbreak

- Getting Past Your Breakup: How to Turn a Devastating Loss into the Best Thing That Ever Happened to You by Susan J. Elliot, J.D., M.Ed.

Death

- I Wasn't Ready to Say Goodbye: Surviving, Coping and Healing After the Sudden Death of a Loved One by Brook Noel.

There are many other helpful resources for coping with various situations or challenges in your life. Feel free to visit [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), a bookstore, or a library to find helpful resources. You can also speak with a professional through the university's counseling center or a private counseling clinic. The most important thing is that you take action to overcome situations and challenges so you can be the best that you can be in life!