



Calm, Rational Decisions Work Best in Difficult Times

By Jeanne Marie Leslie

What Can ALAP Do For Me?

The Alabama Lawyer Assistance Program (ALAP) is a free *confidential* program of the Alabama State Bar which offers 24-hour assistance to Alabama lawyers, judges and law students. ALAP works to assist members with addiction and other mental health issues. What many are often surprised to learn is that ALAP is also an excellent resource for stress-related problems familiar to most lawyers' daily lives. ALAP receives calls about:

- procrastinating behaviors
- relationship problems
- anger problems
- stress management
- aging parents
- loss and grief
- financial worries
- depression
- addiction and other compulsive behaviors

The Best Reason to Call ALAP

You recognize that you need to be healthy in order to help others. It is no sur-

prise to the professionals who treat members of the legal profession that practicing law is stressful. Managing a law practice, and juggling financial and family responsibilities is difficult but many lawyers also take on their clients' problems and make them their own. ALAP understands that lawyers are often the advice-givers and are professionally trained to focus on what other individuals need. However, lawyers, who focus solely on their clients' needs without regard to their own, are particularly susceptible to stress-related illnesses. Stress-related illnesses include high blood pressure, heart disease, migraines, ulcers, and immune-compromised disorders such as cancer and rheumatoid arthritis. When under extraordinary stress, lawyers—like other busy professionals—may perform their obligations at less than satisfactory levels, causing mistakes, lapse of judgment and negligence. Some individuals, in an attempt to cope, self medicate with addictive substances or behaviors. Others may turn to self-defeating thought processes and critical thinking. These types of coping methods can destroy a law career and ultimately a lawyer's life. How you handle stress is not about how strong you are; it is

about how well you learned and implemented stress-reducing techniques. How well you take care of yourself is reflected in everything you do, including practicing law.

Each of us responds to stress in a different way—so what is stressful for one may not be stressful for another. Listening deeply and conscientiously to ourselves and being vigilant about our health during stressful times is most beneficial to our well-being. Our country is experiencing a tough economic time and the legal profession has been hit considerably hard. Media outlets have seized every opportunity to broadcast declining stock markets, mortgage foreclosures and rising unemployment rates. Minute-to-minute updates are available 24 hours a day. With predictions growing more catastrophic by the minute, watching the news can be hazardous to your health. It is important to realize this will not last forever. Stock markets have always fluctuated and measurements according to the S&P 500 grew more than three-fold during the 1990-2007 years. Unemployment rates have been as high as 23.6 percent in 1932 and then reached the lowest in our country's history in April 2007. Many lawyers are struggling to make a living, pay their debts and stay afloat. ALAP calls have not only increased 45 percent from this time last year, but the gravity of caller distress has intensified as well. ALAP can assist you in developing the skills necessary to handle the difficult situations lawyers often confront. Lawyers are leaders in difficult times. Many are already lending resources and time to public service. Remember that colleagues and other members of the legal profession may also be experiencing challenges and a word of encouragement can go a long way.

Helpful Stress-Reducing Techniques:

- Do not panic. Panic is never helpful. Avoid acting on any sense of urgency in reacting to situations. Instead, make calm, rational decisions.
- If you find the news is increasing your anxiety turn it off.
- Get back to basics—safety is first. What do you need to do to keep you and your family safe?

- Identify your financial concerns and make a plan. Ask for accountability from a trusted friend or family member.
- Stay in the moment. Projecting into the future is often with worst-case scenarios. This type of thinking is anxiety producing and a means to de-focus from the here and now. Stay in the here and now.
- Listen to yourself talk and avoid all-or-nothing thinking.
- Avoid caffeine as it can increase feelings of anxiousness. If you are feeling down then avoid alcohol. Alcohol is a depressant and may intensify feelings of depression.
- Utilize your support systems. Talk to friends and family members. Isolating and keeping concerns to yourself is a sure way to prolong feelings of despair.
- Get enough sleep and exercise and put healthy food on your plate and in your body.
- See a doctor or therapist if feelings of despair and hopelessness persist.

What Can I Expect When I Call ALAP?

You can expect and will receive complete confidential assistance and support. ALAP offers referral services to address

overall well-being, which may include brief counseling for work-related or personal issues, as well as referrals to professional treatment providers. ALAP has a library of educational resources, peer support mentoring as well as financial assistance for treatment expenses when needed. Lawyers provide services to improve lives. It only makes sense when lawyers are in need of these types of services the same commitment and concern is extended. ALAP is interested not only in the well-being of the profession, but in the well-being of the individual lawyer. Call us today or visit us on the Web under programs at alabar.org.

ALAP has recently hired a new case manager. Shannon Knight started with ALAP last month. She has obtained her master's degree in psychology and is already meeting with clients. Shannon is enthusiastic about working with us and has begun taking over many of our cases. Shannon has worked with members of the legal profession for several years and comes to us from the ASB Lawyer Referral Service. We are so grateful to have her and look forward to working with her for many years to come. ▲▼▲

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