

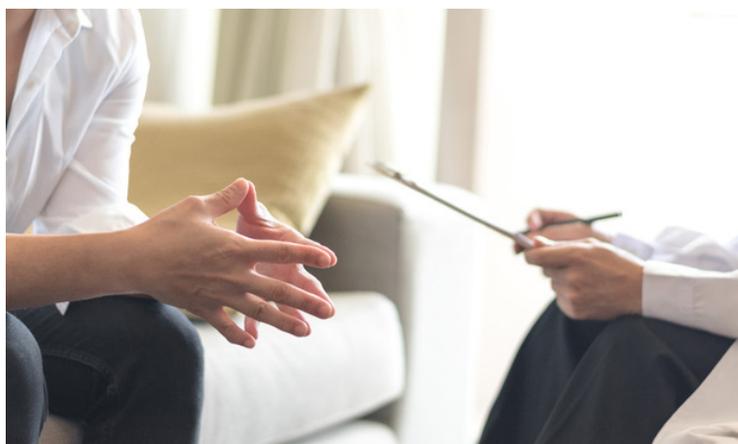
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Free, Confidential Counseling

The State Bar of Georgia has developed the “Use Your Six” program (#useyoursix), offering six free hours of counseling services to lawyers over the telephone with a certified counselor.

By **Katie Leonard** | August 15, 2018



(Photo: Shutterstock)

It's no secret that the legal profession is a stressful one. According to the American Bar Association, lawyers have a higher rate of suicide, substance abuse and depression than the typical population.

The law, by its very nature, is adversarial. Constant conflict. There are lawyers who feel they have to be difficult and aggressive to “zealously advocate” for clients, and lawyers who feel that

creating animosity and strife best serve their clients' interests. In doing so, they refuse simple and professional requests that spike stress levels and tension.

Then, there are the clients. Our clients need our help, but some clients are at their worst—paying large sums of money, sometimes life savings or money borrowed—to defend their interests in litigation. Because of the financial and situational stress, they

quickly lose sight of the realities of the legal practice and become easily frustrated by its glacial pace. They ask questions like, “Why am I constantly on the defensive?” “What are you doing to fight for me?” and “Why is the judge letting him/her get away with that?”

Lawyers who are fighting difficult adversaries and managing high client expectations are in a cesspool of stress, and many resort to drug or alcohol abuse as a coping mechanism.

The State Bar of Georgia has developed the “Use Your Six” program (#useyoursix), offering six free hours of counseling services to lawyers over the telephone with a certified counselor. The initiative encourages lawyers who may be facing high stress levels, depression and substance abuse issues to have an anonymous, free and accessible way to seek help. The program also provides support for suicide prevention and awareness for lawyers contemplating suicide, and a work/life program for assistance with issues like child care, elder care and finances. Many local bar associations have similar support programs for their members.

Lawyers can help each other get through hard times by participating in the “Georgia Lawyers Helping Lawyers” program. Volunteers receive one hour of ethics and one hour of professionalism CLE credit. Lawyers may sign up to volunteer at www.GeorgiaLHL.org (<http://www.GeorgiaLHL.org>).

Individually, lawyers must find positive ways to reduce stress in order to effectively manage their cases. As an attorney who deals primarily with high conflict divorces and contested child custody disputes, my case load can be unbearable at times. Lawyers who litigate spend hours in the courtroom only to come home to an inbox of several hundred unread emails and voicemails.

Over the years, I have heard of many different strategies for managing stress. Yoga, running and fitness regimes are common outlets for lawyers. However, the best strategy for me has been the “me” day. After a lengthy trial or month with heavy billable

hours, I take a day for myself. I work out, go to the lake or neighborhood pool, do things around my house, or play with my dogs. I feel a huge difference in my stress level going to work the next day.

As a profession, it is incumbent we take care of ourselves and preserve the honorable practice of law for those succeeding us. As my mentor says, "Keep your eye on the prize. Your health and your family come first. You must take care of it."

Katie Leonard, a partner at Boyd Collar Nolen & Tuggle, is vice chair of the State Bar of Georgia's Attorney Wellness Task Force.