

Mental Health Wellness Tips for Lawyers During the Pandemic

1. Practice self-acceptance. This relates to the concept that we are doing too many things in this moment under fear and stress. This is not a recipe for success, as we often relay to our clients. Instead, focus on “radical self-acceptance”, which requires accepting everything about yourself, your current situation, and your life without question or blame. Do the best you can in an impossible situation.
2. Stick to a routine. This helps you maintain a sense of normalcy. Go to sleep and wake up at reasonable times. Develop a written schedule that provides time for work and self-care. This is especially important for parents who are now tasked with homeschooling and those who now provide caretaker services. Keeping a schedule is good for both mental health and productivity.
3. Dress for the social life you want, not the social life you have. Maintain personal hygiene. Shower, dress in comfortable clothes, and brush your teeth. Try other things like baths, facials, or pedicures. Wear colors that make you feel happy and clothes that make you feel good. How we dress can impact our mood.
4. Find some time to move. This can sometimes overlap with tip number five. You should set aside at least thirty minutes of every day to move/exercise. There are many apps with free movement exercises and there are many workouts available on YouTube. If you have kids at home, try GoNoodle.com. It is a great way for the whole family to move. You can also try a family dance party.
5. Get outside for at least thirty minutes each day. Fresh air can lift your spirits. If you are nervous about contact with others, try going early in the morning, stay in your personal space (yard), or just open the windows and blast the fan. You can also try a Verilux light therapy lamp.
6. Reach out to others. It is imperative that we stay connected during this crisis. Connect with colleagues, staff, and family to seek and provide support. You can set up virtual meetings and/or social hours via Zoom and other web meeting applications or simply just call someone on the telephone/Facetime.
7. Stay hydrated and eat well. Maintaining a healthy diet is important for both your physical and mental health. We may find ourselves over-indulging right now, maybe you are avoiding food or just forgetting to eat. Either way, try to plan nutritious meals and drink plenty of water. Try apps like Myfitnesspal or iTrackBites if you need a program to help you track your intake. Limit your alcohol consumption.
8. Create a self-care toolkit. This will be a little different for everyone. Many articles discuss self-care strategies that involve a sensory component. Some ideas for your toolkit may include soft/weighted blanket, hot chocolate or tea, looking at photographs of happy

memories, comforting music, essential oils, journals, books, bubbles, mint gum, Listerine strips, ginger ale, Play-Doh, a stress ball or a warm bath.

9. Spend time with children, family, and/or pets. This can strengthen your relationships and support system and in turn will make you feel better.
10. Give everyone the benefit of the doubt. We are all cooped up right now and it can bring out the worst in us. We will all have our moments where we are not at our best, so be patient, be compassionate, be flexible, and communicate empathetically to others. This includes family, employees, and other lawyers.
11. Expect behavior issues in children and respond gently. Everyone is struggling. If you have a partner, give each other breaks.
12. Focus on safety and attachment. We are living with unprecedented demands. Work deadlines, homeschooling, extracurricular activities, sanitizing our house, and finding entertainment in confinement. We can become consumed with meeting expectations in all these areas, but we must remember that this is scary for our kids and other people. Focus on strengthening the connection with them through spending time with them and providing reassurances that you will be there for them during this time. This will in turn make the other concepts listed here much easier.
13. Find your own work/retreat space. This will help you mentally separate the two and help you maintain work-life balance that is always important.
14. Consume the news in moderation. There is so much coverage on COVID-19 right now and there is a lot of information that is sensationalized and alarming. Identify the few trusted sources that you can check in with consistently but limit it to a few times a day at set times. Do not linger over the news.
15. Find a project. Learn to plan an instrument, put together a puzzle, paint, read books, or even binge watch Tiger King. Find something that will keep you busy and engaged to take breaks from what is going on in the outside world.
16. Find something you can control and control the heck out of it. There is a lot of uncertainty in the world right now, so pick something in your little corner of the world and tackle it. For instance, organizing your house. It helps anchor us when things in the bigger picture are chaotic.
17. Notice the good in the world. There is a lot of scary information out there but there are also many stories of people sacrificing, donating, and supporting one another in miraculous ways. So counter balance the heavy with hopeful information. A good source for inspirational stories is John Krasinski's new show SGN (Some Good News).
18. Help others. There are many ways, big and small, that we can help others right now. Reach out to neighbors. Donate time, money, or even your skill set.

19. Find humor in each day. What the world is experiencing right now is no joke. There is a lot to be worried about, with good reason, but you must balance that heaviness with some humor.
20. Remind yourself that this is temporary. Right now things are tough and it feels like it is never going to end. But this too shall pass. Life may change but one day we will feel free, safe, and connected again.
21. Find the lesson. This crisis can seem sad, senseless, and maybe even avoidable, but use this stressful time to build a happier, more resilient, and more meaningful life. Appreciate the things you did not appreciate before. Use this experience as a catalyst to be a better version of yourself.
22. Take quarantine moment by moment. We do not know how this crisis is going to play out. Chunk your time into small pieces that are more manageable. Move through the stress in pieces.
23. Stay connected to your faith. For those of you who practiced religion prior to this crisis, maintain that connection. Find services online and/or pray in whatever manner you are accustomed. Maintaining the bond with your faith can provide you with hope and lift your spirits.
24. Breathe. Breathing is obviously necessary for survival and is essential to our existence. However, it can also be a tool to reduce stress and anxiety. There are many online resources that provide breathing exercises tailored for this purpose.
25. Ask for help. If you find yourself unable to manage your stress and anxiety on your own, there are many resources for you to reach out to for help. WVJLAP is free and confidential and is available to attorneys, judges, bar applicants and law students who may be struggling with, among other things, stress and anxiety. If you think you need to speak to a health care provider, WVU Medicine is offering virtual mental health visits and you can visit wvumedicine.org for providers and availability.

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- Toni Goodykoontz, M.D., J.D., Pandemic Anxiety (2020), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hr3cF_04oZ8 (last visited April 17, 2020).
- James H. Berry, D.O.

OTHER ONLINE RESOURCES

- The West Virginia Judicial & Lawyer Assistance Program (WVJLAP)
<https://wvjlap.org>
- West Virginia State Bar
<https://wvbar.org>
- American Bar Association
https://www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance/resources/covid-19--mental-health-resources/
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>
- WVU Medicine
<https://wvumedicine.org/rni/behavioral-medicine/>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hr3cF_04oZ8