



Lawyers Assistance: Help When Life Seems Out of Control

The winter holidays are upon us once again and, while they can mean times of good cheer, they can also bring incredible stress to someone who is already feeling overwhelmed by life, work, and family. The solution may seem simple: another couple of drinks, a few more pills. But self-medication for stress, depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues can lead down a very dark path.

In an effort to help legal professionals who may find themselves on that dark path, the Akron Bar Association offers the services of the Lawyers Assistance Committee.

The committee provides education and confidential assistance to lawyers, judges and law school students who are affected by the problems of alcohol or substance abuse, stress, depression, or other mental health issues. Consistent with the mission of the Bar Association, the goal is to assist in the prevention and early identification of problems that can affect professional conduct and quality of life. The intent is to provide intervention before the problems become overwhelming.

Alcoholism, substance abuse, addictive behavior, and psychological problems are treatable illnesses rather than moral issues. The only stigma attached to these illnesses is an individual's failure to seek help. It is the responsibility of the recovering legal community to help colleagues who may not recognize their need for assistance.

When a committee member receives a referral, that person reaches out to the individual to offer them someone to talk to and resources to assist them to get help before their behavior negatively impacts their personal and professional life.

Lawyers Assistance services are STRICTLY confidential pursuant to Professional Conduct Rule 8.3(c), and each member of the committee, as well as staff, signs an oath affirming their commitment to confidentiality.

Self-Test for Potential Drug/Alcohol Abuse:

1. Do I plan my office routine around my drinking/drug use?
2. Have I tried unsuccessfully to control or abstain from alcohol or drugs?
3. Do my clients, associates, or support personnel contend that my alcohol/drug use interferes with my work?
4. Have I avoided important professional, social, or recreational activities as a result of my alcohol/drug use?
5. Do I ever use alcohol or drugs before meetings or court appearances to calm my nerves or to feel more confident of my performance?
6. Do I frequently drink or use drugs alone?

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7. Have I ever neglected the running of my office or misused funds because of my alcohol or drug use?
8. Have I ever had a loss of memory when I seemed to be alert and functioning but had been using alcohol or drugs?
9. Have I missed or adjourned closings, court appearances, or other appointments because of my alcohol/drug use?
10. Is drinking or drug use leading me to become careless of my family's welfare or other personal responsibilities?
11. Has my ambition or efficiency decreased along with an increase in my use of drugs or alcohol?
12. Have I continued to drink or use drugs despite adverse consequences to my practice, health, legal status, or family relationships?
13. Are strong emotions, related to my drinking or drug use (e.g. fear, guilt, depression, severe anxiety) interfering with my ability to function professionally?
14. Are otherwise close friends avoiding being around me because of my alcohol or drug use?
15. Have I been neglecting my hygiene, health care, or nutrition?
16. Am I becoming increasingly reluctant to face my clients or colleagues in order to hide my alcohol/drug use?

Self-Test for Depression:

1. I am unable to do the things I used to do
2. I feel hopeless about the future
3. I can't make decisions
4. I feel sluggish or restless
5. I am gaining or losing weight
6. I get tired for no reason
7. I am sleeping too much or too little
8. I feel unhappy
9. I become irritable or anxious
10. I think about dying or killing myself

If you answered yes to question 10, you should seek help immediately, regardless of your answer to any other questions.

If you answered "yes" to five or more of these questions, and you have felt this way every day for several weeks, there is a good chance you are suffering from depression and should seek professional help. The Lawyers Assistance Committee can refer you to a licensed mental health professional.

Contact information for the Lawyers Assistance Committee is listed below. Those with alcohol or substance abuse issues or with mental health difficulties need not walk their dark path alone.

Jackie Billett, Staff Liaison
330.436.0112
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John Myers, Committee Co-Chair
330.535.0850
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Magistrate Susan Baker Ross, Co-Chair
330.375.2912
sross@akronohio.gov

For a complete list of Lawyers Assistance Committee members who can help, visit our website at www.akronbar.org



Member Center

