

# Help Is Out There

Lawyers are often perfectionists who perceive difficulties coping with challenges as failure. Now is a time to be kinder to ourselves and to others. Get help if you need it, or encourage someone else to do so.

BY LYNN GARSON

Some of us are no strangers to waking up in the morning with a generalized sense of unease. Many lawyers, however, are new to this sensation, a byproduct of the extended COVID-19 isolation, coupled with pain and sorrow over racial and social injustice following the killing of George Floyd and others. Many of our colleagues, while uneasy, are not sure how to address these feelings and often beat themselves up for having them in the first place. Or, they may maintain a state of ongoing denial, as if we lawyers are somehow



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immune because we are, as a rule, smart and competent. Many lawyers do this in spite of the fact that attorneys have been found to experience problematic drinking consistent with alcohol use disorders at a higher rate than other professional populations, as well as high rates of depression and anxiety.<sup>1</sup> And further notwithstanding that according to an informal CDC survey released on August 14, 2020,<sup>2</sup> an astounding 40 percent of those surveyed reported struggling with mental health issues stemming from the pandemic—disproportionately more between the ages of 18 and 44. This finding exactly doubles the standard estimate<sup>3</sup> that 20 percent of the population in the United States lives with a mental health and/or substance use issue.

If we accept that, as the chief medical officer of the National Alliance on Mental Illness recently commented, “you can conclusively say the adults are not alright in America . . . ,”<sup>4</sup> what can we do to address our issues, to take care of ourselves? In Georgia, we are fortunate to have a robust Lawyer Assistance Program (LAP) and Peer Program (formally Lawyers Helping Lawyers or LHL) to help. The purpose of this article is to demystify both programs and encourage attorneys to view their services broadly and use them creatively.

### Why #UseYour6?

You may have wondered about the hashtag “#UseYour6” on the Bar’s website and social media. It represents the six pre-paid counseling sessions per calendar year with a licensed counselor offered through the LAP. By virtue of recent changes in the Bar rules, there is no pipeline to discipline from the LAP, and the sessions are available to all Bar members in good standing. CorpCare Associates, Inc., an outside clinical contractor, provides a network of hundreds of counselors and mans the confidential LAP hotline (800-327-9631) every day of the year, 24/7.

## Choosing a Therapist

Adapted from “Choosing a Therapist” from *GuidanceResources*® Online.

BY PLAMEN RUSSEV

The type of therapist that is right for you will depend on your problem and situation. You may feel more comfortable talking to a same-sex therapist, or you may prefer the expertise and insight of a professional of the opposite sex.

- **Psychiatrists** have completed medical school and a residency in psychiatry. They are also licensed to prescribe medications.
- **Psychologists** possess doctorate degrees in psychology and typically have two years of supervised training.
- **Psychoanalysts** have doctorate degrees in psychiatry or psychology, as well as up to five years of supervised training. They have usually undergone psychoanalysis themselves.
- **Licensed or certified social workers** possess master’s degrees plus typically two years of supervised, post-graduate training.
- **Family or marriage counselors** have master’s or doctorate degrees and typically two years of supervised clinical experience. (Note that licensing requirements may vary from state to state.)

When choosing a therapist, you should also consider his or her approach to counseling and treatment.

- **Psychotherapy** helps explore unconscious conflicts, unre-

solved past issues and defense mechanisms that may trigger undesired thoughts, feelings and behaviors to produce change.

- **Behavioral cognitive therapy** aims to replace your undesired behaviors with useful ones and to help you identify and alter your ways of thinking and behaving to produce change.
- **Humanistic therapy** is based on the principle that people are continually growing and self-actualizing. Humanistic therapists focus on creating a safe place for patients to explore new ways of thinking, feeling and behaving to produce change.
- **Experiential therapy** uses experience-based, emotionally-charged methods to produce change.
- **Family therapy** focuses on the dynamics of family relationships.
- **Marital (couples) therapy** concentrates on improving the dynamics of your relationship with a significant other and involves both partners participating in treatment.
- **Group therapy** allows you to relate to others with similar problems, provide and receive support and learn new social skills in a group setting. ●

When you call for the first (or any) time, it is very normal to feel uneasy. You may not even be sure what type of help you need. You don't need to know! The intake counselors answering the line are trained to help you figure that out. They will ask you helpful questions to determine if this is an emergency and, if so, will provide immediate support. If not an emergency, they will help you find a licensed counselor based on your location, gender and counseling practice preferences (see sidebar on p. 63) and will give you the counselor's contact information. You can discuss with your intake counselor any questions or concerns you may have about choosing or seeing a counselor. Then, you may call the recommended therapist and ask them anything you need to know about their qualifications or style of work before scheduling a visit, which can be held via videoconference. Your CorpCare intake counselor will follow up by email or phone to make sure you have been able to schedule your first appointment or help you find another counselor. CorpCare can also make referrals to treatment facilities and make anonymous outreach calls, if you are concerned about the mental health of a colleague.

Why would one of us decide to "use our 6?" When people think of a counselor or therapist, they often think that to be seen requires a formal diagnosis of, let's say, depression or bipolar disorder. Not so. Below are some scenarios that can be addressed with a counselor:

- You are working at home with children needing attention 24/7. Your spouse or partner is a teacher who is working remotely and has class from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. with only a few breaks.
- You have an elderly parent living alone, and you are solely responsible for supervising the aide who comes in, but now you have tested positive for COVID-19 and can't go to your parent's home.
- You have to appear in a court that doesn't mandate that masks be worn, but you believe masks are important,

and you are afraid because you are already at risk as a diabetic.

- You're recently sober and had started attending AA meetings, but now they are virtual, which doesn't feel quite the same. Also, all of your friends are talking about drinking more to cope with their stress, which triggers you and jeopardizes your recovery, which also scares you.
- You have to tell your client that the thing that means the world to them is "non-essential" and therefore being deferred by the court.
- You have a fire drill project, but four people are streaming content in your house, and your internet doesn't have enough bandwidth, so you keep getting bounced.
- You have daily conference calls on Zoom, but half the time it stops working in the middle of the call.
- You live alone, are over 60 and have a respiratory condition. You have not been closer than six feet to another human being in eight months, and more than six feet only four times.
- You have lost someone dear to you and can't properly grieve. You couldn't even attend the funeral.
- On top of all of this, you are Black or another minority affected disproportionately by both COVID-19 and racial injustice.

Any one of these scenarios is a good reason to use your six prepaid counseling sessions. Right now, added to normal life stresses, most of us are experiencing increased family stress, client stress, work stress, technology stress, financial stress, isolation stress, medical stress, grief and more. A trained CorpCare counselor can help with any and all of these. The counselor understands that everything we did before COVID-19 has become exponentially more difficult and that some of us are floundering, if not outright drowning. The counselor may not be able to change your life or solve the problem, but he or she can first help you name the issues and, second, find tools to manage them.

## Lawyers Helping Lawyers

By the same token, sometimes counseling is not the only fit. Sometimes, what you want is to talk to someone who has shared your experiences, be it the commonality of the stresses of practicing law, the difficulties of staying in recovery or the challenges of trying to keep your legal practice afloat in the face of cycles of depression. To fill that need, the LAP created Lawyers Helping Lawyers, or the "Peer Program," a program of peer-to-peer support found at [www.georgialhl.org](http://www.georgialhl.org). Online anonymous matches are made between trained volunteers and participants based on criteria selected by the participant and sent to an encrypted database monitored by CorpCare. Such criteria include years in practice, location, gender and areas of "lived experience," such as depression, anxiety, bipolar, eating disorders, PTSD, addictions to drugs, alcohol, work or gambling, and all the other challenges lawyers, as any member of the public, might face. All communications to the LAP by Bar members and volunteers, between members and their peer volunteer and between members, volunteers and CorpCare are required to be held in confidence other than in the case of imminent risk of harm to self or others.

The traditional view of peer programs is that their value is in the healing power of being heard by a listener who has walked in your shoes. It's true that peer programs are enormously valuable for that very reason. Sometimes simply being heard is enough to release the steam that has built up inside.

But a creative view of our Peer Program, LHL, is far more expansive. A peer can be a "buddy" for check-ins to monitor whether the participant is off track. This can be a real boon for a solo practitioner without office staff, who is seeing only clients or staying in bed rather than working at all. A peer can clarify what it is like to seek counseling from a therapist by answering questions like, "What will they ask me?" "Is it embarrassing or awkward?" "Do you really tell your therapist the truth?" A peer can shed light on what it is like to attend a 12-step meeting, even a virtual one: "Do I have to speak at the first meeting?" "What if I don't even know what the 12 steps are?"

“Will people judge me?” There is tremendous value in all of these methods.

### The Next Step

Armed with information about what is available in both of these programs, the first thing all of us need to do is to have enough compassion for ourselves to get help if we need it. Lawyers are often perfectionists who perceive difficulties coping with the challenges above as failure. Now is the time to be kinder to ourselves and to others. Get help if you need it, or encourage someone else to do so. Don't forget about #UseYour6. Don't forget about the Peer Program. They are both available at all times to help you make your way through the current tumult and beyond. ●



**Lynn Garson** practices health care law at Baker & Hostetler and is a mental health advocate and author. Garson is the chair of the Lawyer

Assistance Committee and helped to develop the Lawyers Helping Lawyers Program at the State Bar of Georgia.

### Endnotes

1. Patrick R. Krill et al., *The Prevalence of Substance Use and Other Mental Health Concerns Among American Attorneys*, JOURNAL OF ADDICTION MEDICINE, 2016, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4736291/>.
2. Mark E. Czeisler et al., *Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, MMWR MORBIDITY AND MORTALITY WEEKLY REPORT, 2020, [https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm?s\\_cid=mm6932a1\\_w](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm?s_cid=mm6932a1_w).
3. *Mental Illness*, NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH, 2019, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness.shtml>.
4. Jacqueline Howard & Andrea Kane, *CDC study sheds new light on mental health crisis linked to coronavirus pandemic*, CNN, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/13/health/mental-health-coronavirus-pandemic-cdc-study-wellness/index.html>.



There's always a good reason to #UseYour6.

Through the Lawyer Assistance Program, there is no cost for a State Bar of Georgia member to use this program, which provides six clinical sessions per calendar year with an independent, fully licensed counselor near your office or home, or conducted virtually. All sessions are strictly confidential.

Call the LAP Hotline at  
800-327-9631 today.