

Tips to Maintain Your Mental Health in Law School

Law school can have a significant negative impact on the mental health of law students. For many, starting law school is overwhelming. Having to find new friends, start a higher level of education, and adjust to living in a new place adds to the already present stress that comes with being a law student. The environment in law school is very competitive, and in such an isolated environment it is easy to think that the entire world revolves around how well you do in your classes.

Students who did well in their undergraduate studies and thrive on academic validation are shocked to find that they cannot breeze through law school classes as easily as they once were able to as an undergraduate student. As a result of the pressure from law school and the limited number of hours available in a day, law students often short themselves on sleep as well. This sleep deprivation ultimately leads to more stress.

Finding the Balance Between Mental Health and Law School

Your grades and performance in school are important, but you can't pour from an empty glass. If you do not find a way to take care of your mental health, your grades in school will almost definitely suffer. Striking the correct balance between mental health and law school can be tricky, and there will be times when you have to decide if pushing through a mental slump is worth it. Most of the time, it's not.

The main issue students find with finding the balance between taking care of their mental health and doing well in law school is time. Students feel like so much of their time is taken by studying, reading, prepping for a class, preparing an oral argument, researching, and writing papers that there is no time left to dedicate to taking care of themselves. The truth of it is, if you don't make time for self-care, you will not be your most efficient or productive self and the time you spend on schoolwork will essentially be wasted because you are not in the mindset to absorb the information you need. Taking time for mental health, whether it is to go to the gym, hang out with friends, or watch your favorite TV show is essential to success in law school. Additionally, it is helpful to put things in perspective. When you feel overwhelmed, it is helpful to remember that you are on a giant rock floating through space with millions of other people. While school is important to you and your grades matter, in the grand scheme of things the world will keep spinning and life will continue regardless of how you do.

Why Taking Breaks is Important

In the same vein as taking care of your mental health, it is important to give yourself rest to avoid burnout. Burnout is the feeling that you are just mentally drained and unable to learn anymore. Burnout is very common with how demanding and time-consuming law school can be, and it can appear in a variety of ways. You could be reading a paragraph with no distractions and realize that you are actually not reading at all and that you have had to go back and reread that paragraph multiple times. It could be waking up in the morning and feeling like you don't have

any energy left in you to work. Whatever way burnout may manifest, it should not be ignored. It is a waste of time to read one paragraph five times or to wake up and try to force yourself to read, knowing you won't be able to retain any of the information.

Not only will breaks help you retain the information better, they will help you retain the information more efficiently. Trying to study for 8 hours will only be productive for the first few hours before your brain becomes too exhausted to really sort through the information and commit it to memory. By taking a break within that 8 hour time span, you will be able to look at the material from a new perspective with fresh eyes. This ultimately will help not only with understanding the material, but memorizing it as well. This is especially important if you are continually studying something over and over and it is not clicking in your brain. Taking a break will help your brain process and understand the information more.

If you are feeling burnt out, give yourself some time off. This can mean taking a ten-minute study break or it can mean taking an hour off to relax and give your brain a minute to cool off. It really is more helpful than harmful and you should not feel guilty of giving yourself a break. Depending on how burnt out you are, you may need to take more or less time off. Either way, when you get to the point when you are burnt out, it means it's time for a break.

How To Take Breaks

One way to find the balance is to give yourself a cutoff. For example, do not do any school work after 9:00pm. Then you can take that time before going to sleep to take care of your mental health and do something that you genuinely enjoy, unrelated to law school.

Another choice students sometimes make is to give themselves a day off each week, Sunday for example. Then on Sundays, that student can sleep in, relax, call family and friends, and ultimately reset for the next week. Others prefer to have dinner once a week with friends or family, where they take the time to get ready and go out and then just focus on spending time with those they love. Whatever technique you choose, just know that it is not only possible to find time for mental health, but it is essential.

On top of scheduling and planning when you will take time off, it is important to take small breaks periodically as well. Take a long shower with your favorite playlist, cook a nice meal for yourself, go to the gym, or whatever else you may need to do daily. These daily activities can be turned into time for yourself as well and while they are the basics of self-care, they can also be instrumental in repairing mental health.

Dealing With Imposter Syndrome

Imposter syndrome is the feeling that you do not belong in law school, that you are an imposter there. Imposter syndrome can arise for a number of reasons. It could be that everyone else in law

school has lawyers in the family and you don't. It could be that everyone else has really nice things and you feel like you can't keep up. Or it could simply be that you believe everyone else in law school is smarter than you and you shouldn't be there because you're not smart enough. Whatever the reason for feeling like an imposter, it is important to reflect on why you are at law school and what you have done to get there. Everyone in law school has earned their way there one way or another, and while there may be those select few that make it seem like others have everything handed to them or that they are just super-geniuses, the reality is that many of your peers are feeling the same way.

One of the ways in which you can tackle imposter syndrome is by talking to a friend in law school about it. Chances are, they are feeling the same way and you don't even know it. By talking it through you can get reassurance that you are not alone in this feeling and it is actually pretty common for people to experience. Another way to tackle imposter syndrome is to identify the areas in which you are feeling inadequate. Maybe it is because you think your classmates know significantly more than you do (which is likely not the case). To remedy that, it could be useful to spend some time seeking to learn in the area you feel inadequate. This could mean going to your professor, an advisor, a friend, or maybe even a lawyer you know personally. These people cannot only help you gain knowledge where you feel you are lacking but will likely also be inclined to share a similar experience they have had and give advice on how they got through it. Additionally, Academic Success Fellows (ASFs) and academic support can be a helpful resource to go to if you are struggling with imposter syndrome. Both the ASFs and academic support have been through law school and understand imposter syndrome. Not only do they have personal experience, but they are able to compare where you are in comparison to other law students and give you an objective assessment as to whether you are on track. From that objective standpoint, they can help separate the reality of your situation from the fear of what your situation might be in your head. While it can be easy to get wrapped up in what you don't know, don't forget to take time to appreciate your strengths and the things that you do know.

Ultimately, it is important to realize how common imposter syndrome is and that you are not alone in this feeling. Nobody knows everything, even if it might seem like they do in class. Lean into your strengths and try to strengthen the areas you feel need to be strengthened but don't be too hard on yourself. Everyone is in law school to learn and the person next to you in class also likely feels out of place, maybe for different reasons than you. Approach everyone with kindness and instill confidence in yourself. Look at how far you have come and what you have achieved in life so far. You are not an imposter, you earned your admission to law school and you are more than capable of achieving whatever it is you want to achieve.

Remember, if you ever do need support, that is okay. More than okay, that it is common and normal. There are plenty of resources you can reach out to if you are struggling with time management, mental health, imposter syndrome or any of the other hardships that come along

with being a law student. These resources include family members, friends, a trusted professor, academic support and/or academic success fellows and the resources available at the Barnes Center. Whenever you feel lost or overwhelmed, there is always a support system there to back you up that is available to you whenever you reach out.