



Manitoba's Peer Support
Program for Lawyers

FOR PROGRAMS AND SERVICES VISIT
lawyerstrong-mb.ca

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- * Peer Support
- * Education
- * Lawyer Wellbeing & Resiliency
- * Community
- * Mental Health
- * Recovery & Evolution

Under Pressure

National Study on the Psychological Health Determinants of Legal Professionals in Canada (Cadieux, 2022):

- 56% legal professionals reported experiencing burnout

Higher if: articling (63%), in first 10 years of practice, a woman under 40 (67%); racialized minority; LGBTQ, or have a disability (69%)

- 24% of lawyers have had suicidal ideation since the start of their legal careers (v. 11% of regular population in their *lifetime*)

Area of Practice and Mental Health

Area of Practice	Burnout	Psychol. Distress	Moderate to Severe Depressive Symptoms
Criminal Law	62.7%	62.5%	31.4%
Family Law	60.2%	65.8%	30.3%
Wills, Estates & Trusts	57.4%	57.9%	29.3%
Civil litigation	55.2%	57.3%	30%

Trauma Informed Practice

Can enhance job satisfaction and service provided, and help to prevent burnout.

Many clients, if not all, will have experienced trauma which can have a profound impact on that client's journey through the legal system.

"By integrating trauma awareness and competency into our practice, we can avoid re-traumatizing clients, help them to engage more fully in their case and ultimately contribute to their safety, recovery and healing."

The Trauma-Informed Lawyer-Client Relationship, River Shannon and Jessica Magonet; Golden Eagle Rising Society.

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**How can trauma show up in
your practice?**

Signs of Trauma

Signs of Trauma:

- Recurrent and **intrusive memories** of event
- Reliving event, flashbacks
- Upsetting dreams or nightmares
- Severe emotional distress or physical reactions to something that reminds you of trauma
- **Avoidance**

Avoidance

Avoidance Behaviours

- Avoid talking about it and avoid thinking about it
 - can hinder communication between lawyer and client.
- Avoiding activities, places or people that remind you/them of the traumatic event
 - e.g. clients not showing up for meetings

Trauma

Changes in thinking or mood

- Negative thoughts about self or world / negative expectations or assumptions about others
- Memory problems, including important details of traumatic event
- Difficulty maintaining trust / close relationships
- Detachment from family, friends
- Lack of interest in activities once enjoyed
- Numb

Trauma

Changes in physical and emotional reactions

- Easily startled or frightened
- Guarding – always being on guard for potential threat
- Irritability, angry outbursts or aggressive behaviour
- Overwhelming guilt or shame
- Children 6 or under may re-enact trauma in play, or have frightening nightmares that may or may not be about the traumatic event.
- Can subside and flare up/ or be triggered by events

**Source: PTSD, Mayo Clinic [mayoclinic.org](https://www.mayoclinic.org)*

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**What challenges can trauma
create in delivery of legal
services?**

Trauma Informed Practice

The Interview:

- Create a calm private space.
- Ask permission to ask questions:
 - Turn towards trauma to understand pressures and circumstances that the client may be experiencing, so as to understand client's needs better
 - Ask about what the client's understanding of the process is?
 - What would the client need to help them through the process, what are their fears about the process?
 - What would they like to see happen? Goals.
 - Understand what they identify as being helpful. Transforms disconnection (a trauma response) from those harmed into connection.
 - Lawyers as Healers of Society.

Trauma Informed Practice

- Learning to Recognize trauma responses in self and others
- Ask questions to understand and mitigate harm to client while going through legal system to:
 - empower and engage the client as much as possible in the process.
 - identify modifiable factors that client can have input in.
 - practice healthy boundaries allowing you to psychologically detach at end of workday and take care of your own well-being.

Activity

- Reflect on a case where your client showed a trauma response.
- Reflect on a time where you listened to a client's story of trauma.
- How did you feel at the time.
- How did you feel after.
- How did you respond
- How did it affect your perception of the client

Trauma Informed Practice

If persists for longer than a month, or if severe, or if affecting your life, speak to medical doctor or mental health professional.

Getting treatment as soon as possible can help recovery and prevent worsening of symptoms.

It is never too early to talk to someone, or to seek help.



Signs of Burnout

1. Fatigue / emotional exhaustion
2. Use of alcohol and/or drugs to 'take the edge off', numb out (anxiety) or to stay awake to work longer hours
3. Not able to focus. Loss of productivity
 - may feel badly about that (and revert to item 2)
4. Disengagement / Isolation
 - missing appointments
 - avoiding tasks
 - not answering communications



Warning Signs

Hopelessness - 'nothing will help'; no energy to get help. Cynicism

Feelings of overwhelm. Lack of support.

Decreased professionalism, emotional outbursts, increased aggression, less compassion.

Less effective at work, reduced sense of personal accomplishment.

Flight: may feel like they need to leave their place of employment or the profession.

Causes of Burnout

- Workload demands, billing pressures
- Unrealistic expectations
- Higher emotional demands - greater risk
- Difficulty balancing work and life obligations
- Conflict that is not resolved
- **Life.** When hard things happen in your personal life, coupled with work demands, this can also overload - resulting in burnout

What can we do to stay healthy in law?

BOUNDARIES and AUTONOMY

Thriving lawyers have them!

(Cadieux, 2022)

SKILLS THAT HELP

1. Assertiveness.
2. Psychological Detachment



Off the Meter

Psychological detachment

- separate their cases from themselves
- leave work at work
- visualization

Helps to prevent burnout



Core Skills for Thriving

Assertiveness: “Enough”

- Learn to become comfortable with saying ‘NO’

Benefits:	
Increase resilience, confidence and commitment to profession	Decrease burnout, depressive symptoms and stress
Feel like you have enough control over their work and life	It’s ok if you are not all things to all people.

Your Health First



Autonomic Nervous System, making it work for you (not against you)

Create a peaceful presence through slow deep breathing before, during, and after emotionally intense events.

- Diaphragmatic breath, 4-4-4
- Hand on heart, or on lap, feet on ground.
- Grounding with five senses

Gratitude thinking: replace “have to” with “get to”

Replace scarcity thinking with “enough” or abundance



Self Care and BALANCE

- Self-Care Requires the proper functioning of at least three neuropsychological systems.
- To reduce or prevent compassion fatigue, lawyers must find ways to:
 1. Balance empathic engagement
 2. Regulate autonomic nervous system arousal
 3. Maintain ability to think clearly

Empathy – caring with boundaries

- **Circuits firing** in helper's brain while hearing of a traumatic event *can be the same* as those firing in the person's brain while experiencing or reliving trauma.
- Remember where your role begins and ends as a lawyer. We do not have superpowers. Client's trauma is their experience, and you can be present with them, while not taking it on as your own.

How are We Doing?

- Professional Quality of Life Scale

<https://proqol.org/proqol-measure>

- Site has tools for self care and managing compassion fatigue.

Peer Support



Need Help?

85 lawyers have trained as volunteer peer supporters.

We care, we are here for you.

<https://lawyerstrong-mb.ca>

support@lawyerstrong-mb.ca / admin@lawyerstrong-mb.ca

204-201-1764 – call or text – confidential

9-8-8 - Canada Mental Health Support & Suicide Prevention Crisis Line

Help Someone Else

Join the Movement!
VOLUNTEER

**Call us or Email: support@lawyerstrong-mb.ca or
<https://lawyerstrong-mb.ca>**

WE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER!

THANK YOU!

WORKING TOGETHER TO SUPPORT AND
CREATE A THRIVING LEGAL COMMUNITY
IN MANITOBA

