



▶▶ **WHILE ANXIETY CAN BE HELPFUL IN NORMAL AMOUNTS TO MOTIVATE AND ACCOMPLISH GOALS, AT ITS WORST, IT CAN CAUSE SERIOUS IMPAIRMENT AND CAN LEAD TO FEELINGS OF DEPRESSION, ALIENATION, DEFICIENCY, AND POTENTIALLY THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE I ALWAYS ADVISE PEOPLE THAT SUFFERING IN SILENCE IS NOT THE ANSWER.**



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Do You Worry About How Much You Worry?

When anxiety crosses the threshold from normal to excessive, it's time to seek help.

AS A CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST

WORKING with judges, lawyers, and law students, it is clear to me that anxiety disorders are on the rise in this population and often impair their quality of life. The practice of law itself can increase symptoms of anxiety disorders due to the profession's high levels of stress, uncertainty, ambiguity, competitiveness, and "win-or-lose mentality." By the time a person comes to LAP, they often wonder if the extent of their worries and concerns are warranted or whether their anxiety has crossed a threshold for what is considered "normal." They often reveal that managing their day-to-day activities and responsibilities are becoming more difficult. They feel high levels of guilt and helplessness, have increasing levels of low self-worth and low self-esteem, and believe their self-view as "high-functioning problem solvers" is no longer true.

A recent survey conducted by the American Psychiatric Association indicated that 39 percent of Americans feel more anxious than they did a year ago. This survey found that anxiety is up among men and women, among adults of all ages, and among people of various racial and ethnic groups. A 2016 ABA/Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation survey in which almost 13,000 attorneys responded, found that 19 percent of attorneys experience symptoms of anxiety and 23 percent experience high levels of stress. Anxiety disorders affect 40 million adults in the United States—18 percent of the general population—each year. However, less than 37 percent of individuals with anxiety disorders seek and receive treatment. It also is not uncommon for someone experiencing high levels of anxiety to suffer from depressive symptoms as nearly half of individuals diagnosed with depression are also diagnosed with an anxiety disorder.

While anxiety can be helpful in normal amounts to motivate and accomplish goals, at its worst, it can cause serious impairment and can lead to feelings of depression, alienation, deficiency, and potentially thoughts of suicide. The onset of an anxiety disorder can occur for a variety of reasons, including, but not limited to, genetics, temperament, and challenging life circumstances. As individuals in the legal community, we should assess whether the anxiety we are routinely experiencing is unmanageable and seek out healthy solutions to minimize the negative impact it may have on our lives.

The following is a list of symptom criteria from The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition 2013 (DSM-5) for Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), which may help determine whether your anxiety may be approaching, or at, a clinical level.

Those with GAD often experience:

- 1.) The presence of excessive anxiety and worry about a variety of topics, events, or activities. Worry often occurs more often than not for at least six months and is clearly excessive.
- 2.) Their anxiety is very challenging to control. Their worries may easily shift from one topic to another.
- 3.) At least three of the following physical or cognitive symptoms:
 - edginess or restlessness;
 - tiring easily and being more fatigued than usual;
 - impaired concentration or feeling as though the mind goes blank;
 - irritability (which may or may not be observable to others);
 - increased muscle aches or soreness;

- and/or
- difficulty sleeping (due to trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, restlessness at night, or unsatisfying sleep).

Some people also experience physical symptoms, including sweating, nausea, and stomach or digestive problems. Their anxiety and worry often make it hard to carry out day-to-day activities and responsibilities and often cause problems at work, in relationships, or in other important areas of their lives. If left untreated, people may also begin to experience something called panic disorder, in which a person feels as if they are having a heart attack or dying and may

even seek medical treatment believing they have a physical problem. In some situations, individuals may often overuse or abuse alcohol, marijuana, prescription medications, or other drugs to dull the ongoing suffering and struggles they are experiencing on a daily basis.

Seeking the help of a mental-health professional to diagnose, manage, and treat anxiety disorders is essential. I always advise people that suffering in silence is not the answer. Reaching out to the Illinois Lawyers' Assistance Program (LAP) will help you access the appropriate treatment, which may be critical for living a healthy and full life. LAP can help determine whether even simple

mindfulness techniques, including, but not limited to, meditation, breathing, and yoga may help minimize your symptoms. Of course, it is possible other treatments, such as counseling, medication, and lifestyle changes may be necessary.

If you have any questions or concerns or need help or assistance, please contact LAP. We are happy to talk to you about any matter and will help you find the best solution to increase and optimize your overall well-being and functioning. All services are free and confidential.

We are here to help! Please contact us at illinoislap.org, at 1-800-LAP-1233, or gethelp@illinoislap.org. 

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