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**PROGRAM MATERIALS**

**Program #3603**

**January 30, 2026**

# **From High-Functioning to Non-Functioning: Addressing Mental Health and Substance Misuse in the Legal Profession**

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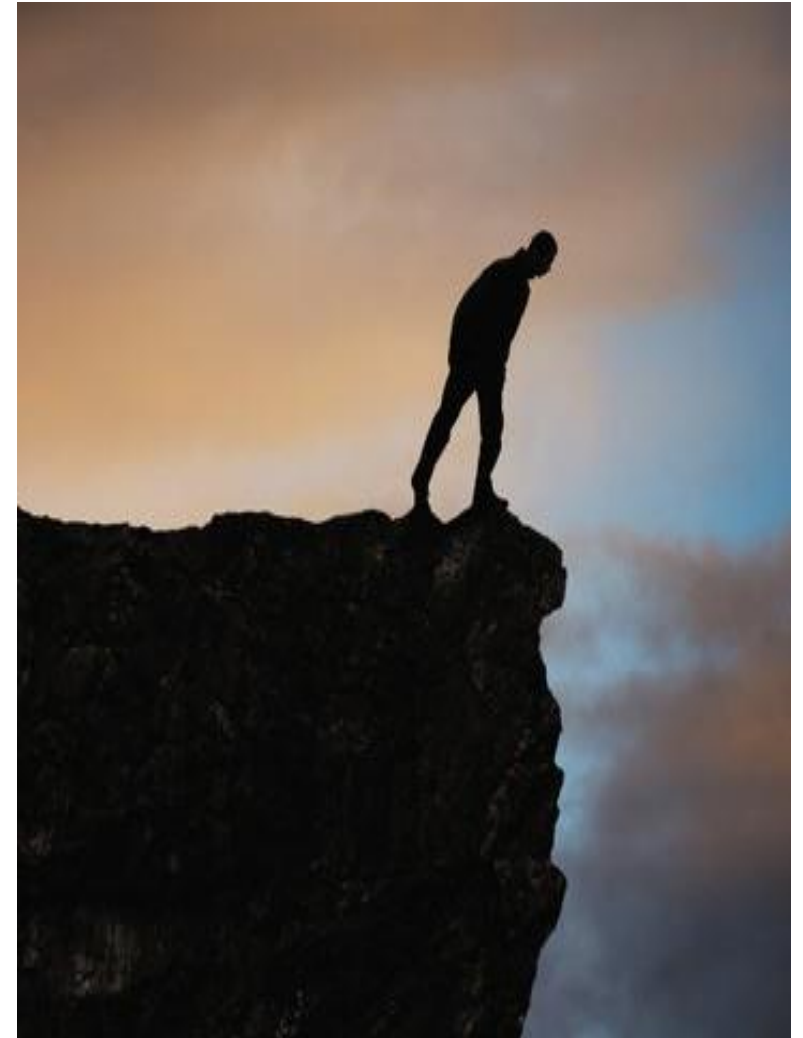
# From High-Functioning to Non-Functioning

Presented by:

Brian S. Quinn, Esq.

Education and Outreach Coordinator

Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers of PA



## **Heading for the Cliff- From High Functioning to Non-Functioning**

Presented by Brian S. Quinn, Esquire  
Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers of PA, Inc.

Brian S. Quinn, Esquire is a licensed attorney in Pennsylvania who currently serves as the Education and Outreach Coordinator for Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers of Pennsylvania, Inc., a Lawyers Assistance Program established in 1988 for the purpose of helping lawyers, judges and law students recover from alcoholism, drug addiction and mental health disorders.

Mr. Quinn obtained his undergraduate degree in 1970, his law degree in 1973 and a certificate in Drug and Alcohol counselling in 2012, from Villanova University. Prior to his role with Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers, he was a private practitioner for over 40 years and has also worked in the field of Alcohol and Drug Counseling in suburban Philadelphia.

Mr. Quinn has written articles and made presentations on lawyer wellness to law firms, state and local bar associations, professional groups and CLE providers on both a national and international level.



## Agenda Items

- Understanding Substance Misuse Disorder
- High-Functioning Behavior
- Consequences of Addiction in the Legal Profession
- Pathways to Recovery and Support Systems

# What Is A LAP ?

Our mission:

To provide a caring peer assistance program to save the lives and restore the health and professional competence of lawyers, members of their families, judges and law students who are at risk as a result of alcohol and drug use, gambling, depression or other serious mental illness. We carry out this mission through a combination of confidential helpline services, volunteer support and education.

## We Protect Your Identity and Information

LAPs do **not**\* report or disclose any identifying information to the Supreme Court, the Judicial Conduct Board, the Disciplinary Board, the Board of Law Examiners or any other agency of the Supreme Court; nor do we report or disclose any identifying information to a State Bar Association, local Bar Associations or any judicial or law related organization. We do not report any identifying information to anyone without your prior consent.

**You may remain anonymous and still receive our services.**

**\*Consult the Rules of Professional Conduct in YOUR STATE**

# We Provide



**Free information  
and literature**



**Free evaluation by  
a healthcare  
professional**



**Free assistance  
with interventions**



**Peer/LCL staff  
support**



**Lawyer/Judge/Law  
Student-only  
support group  
Meetings**

**LCL Helpline**

**1-888-999-1941**

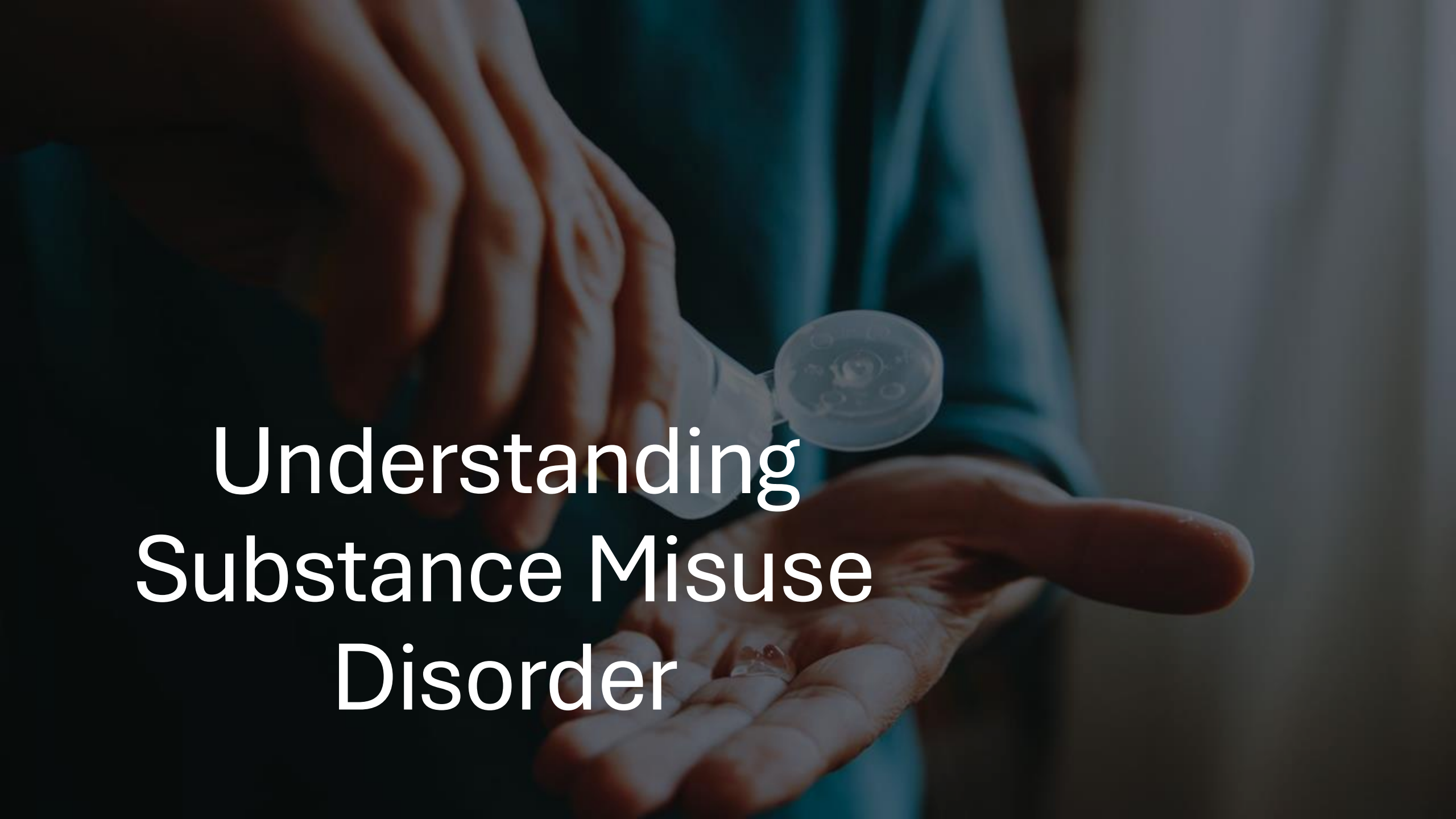
**24/7 Confidential  
Support**

**Our services are  
free, confidential, non-  
judgmental and non-  
obligatory**

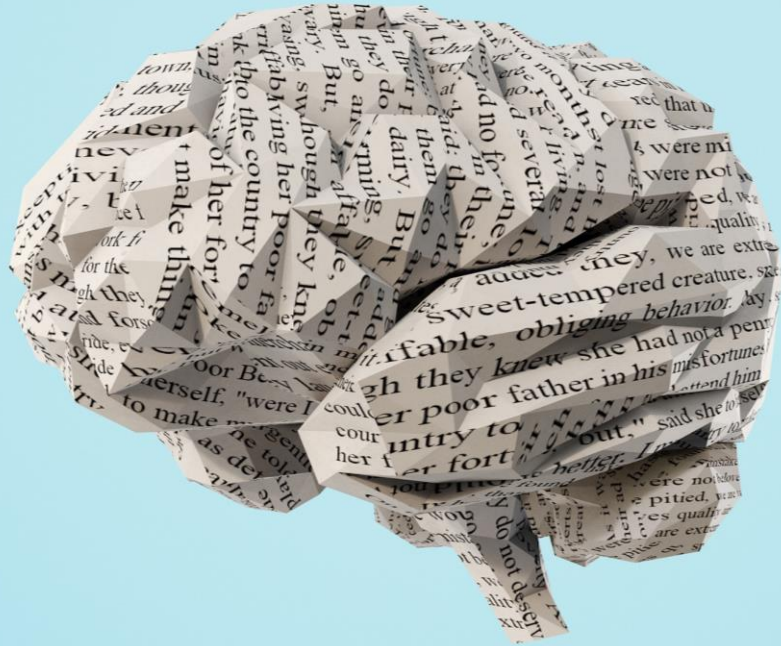
# GUIDANCE FROM THE COURT

ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct address that concern by providing an exception to the duty to report. Rule 8.3(c): “The Rule does not require disclosure of information otherwise protected by Rule 1.6 or information gained by a lawyer or judge while participating in an approved lawyers assistance program.”

**Comment 7 : “Providing for an exception ... encourages lawyers and judges to seek treatment through such a program. Conversely, without such an exception, lawyers and judges may hesitate to seek assistance from these programs, which may then result in additional harm to their professional careers and additional injury to the welfare of clients and to the public.” (emphasis added)**

A person wearing a blue lab coat is shown from the chest down. They are holding a clear syringe in their right hand and a small, clear vial in their left hand. A hand is also visible, holding a small, clear pill. The background is blurred, showing a white wall and a window with blinds.

# Understanding Substance Misuse Disorder



# What Is Substance Misuse Disorder?

Substance Misuse, or Substance Use Disorder, is a pattern of harmful use of any substance for mood-altering purposes.

# Substance Misuse Disorder

## **Inability to Control Use**

Individuals with substance misuse disorder struggle with controlling their consumption of both legal and illegal substances.

## **Cravings and Urges**

Intense cravings and urges are common symptoms that indicate a reliance on substances, which can lead to compulsive use.

## **Continued Use Despite Consequences**

Many individuals continue using substances even when they experience negative consequences, highlighting the seriousness of the disorder.





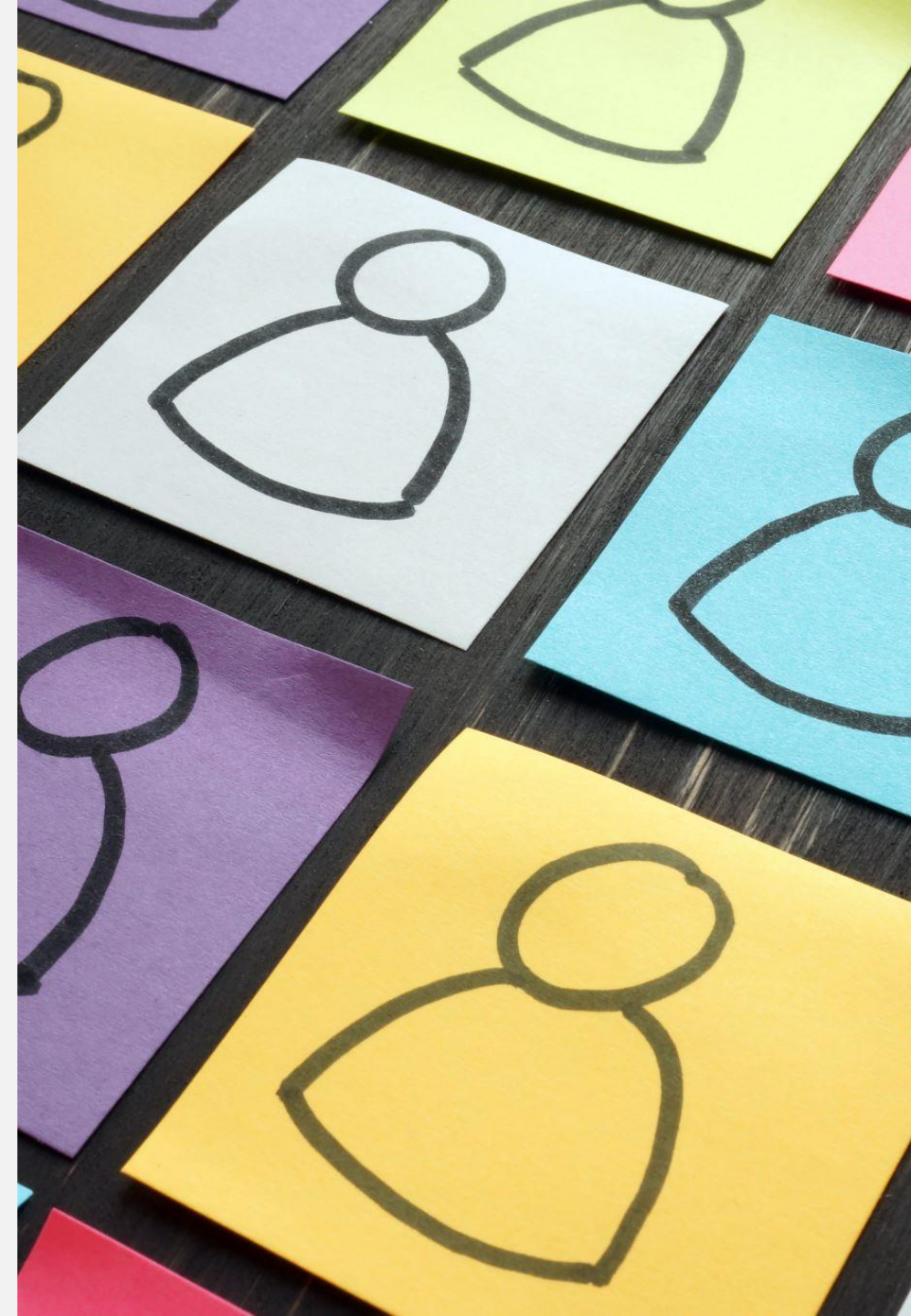
## Common warning Signs of Substance misuse

- It's important to recognize that substance misuse disorder can manifest in various ways, and these warning signs can vary from person to person.

# Common warning Signs of Substance misuse

## **Social Withdrawal:**

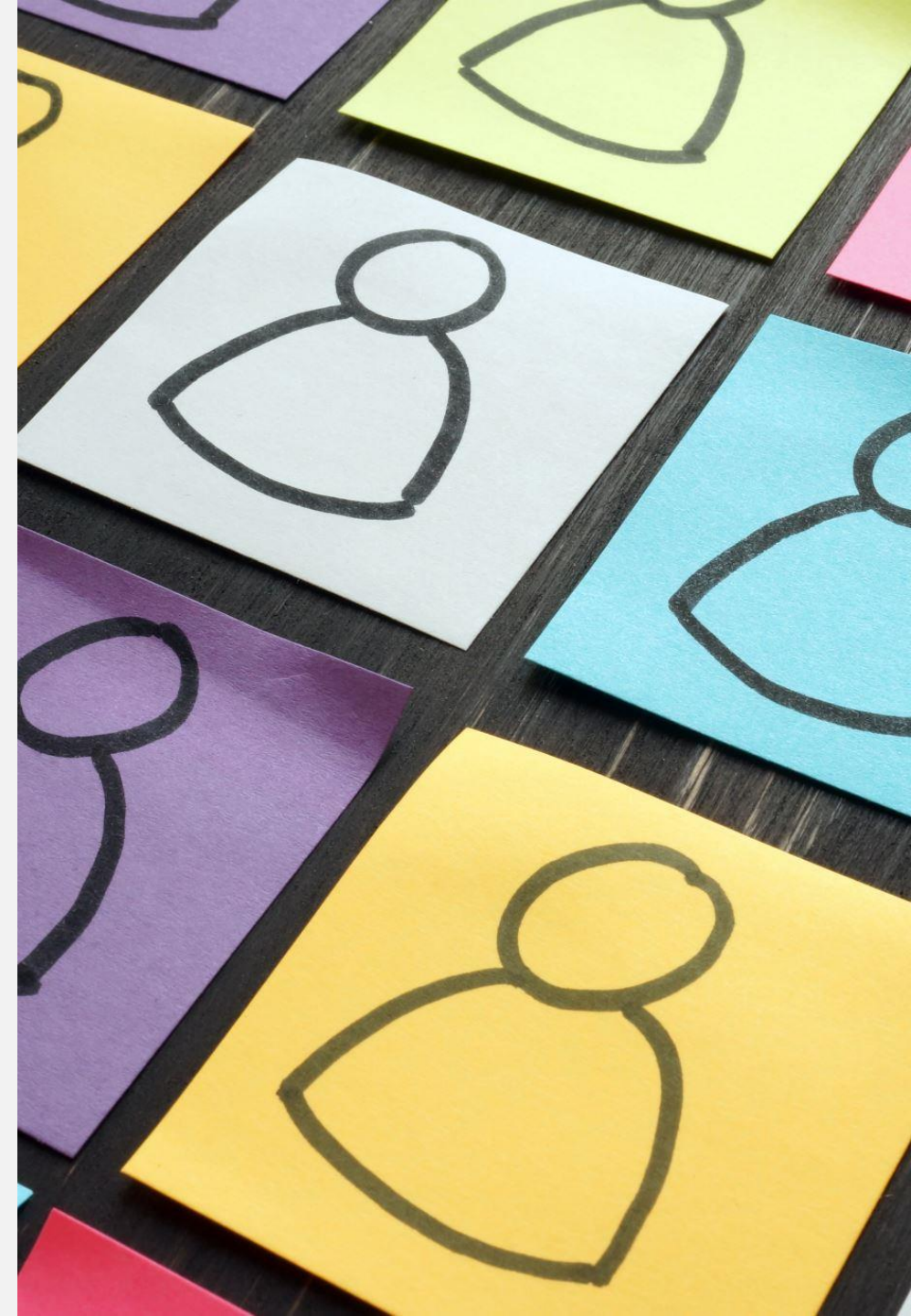
- Isolating from friends and family
- Loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities
- Changes in social circles



# Common warning Signs of Substance misuse

## **Neglect Responsibilities:**

- Isolating from friends and family
- Loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities
- Changes in social circles





# Common warning Signs of Substance misuse

## **Risky Behaviors:**

- Driving under the influence
- Engaging in dangerous activities while intoxicated
- Legal troubles related to substance use



# Common warning Signs of Substance misuse

## **Secretive Behavior:**

- Hiding substance use from others
- Lying about substance use
- Engaging in suspicious or secretive actions



# Common warning Signs of Substance misuse

## **Financial Problems:**

- Unexplained need for money
- Borrowing or stealing money
- Financial instability



# Common warning Signs of Substance misuse

## **Changes in Appearance:**

- Deterioration of personal hygiene.
- Changes in weight or appetite.
- Bloodshot eyes or dilated pupils.

# COMMON WARNING SIGNS OF SUBSTANCE MISUSE

## **Physical Health Problems:**

- Tremors or shaking
- Slurred speech
- Impaired coordination
- Changes in sleep patterns



## **Mood Swings:**

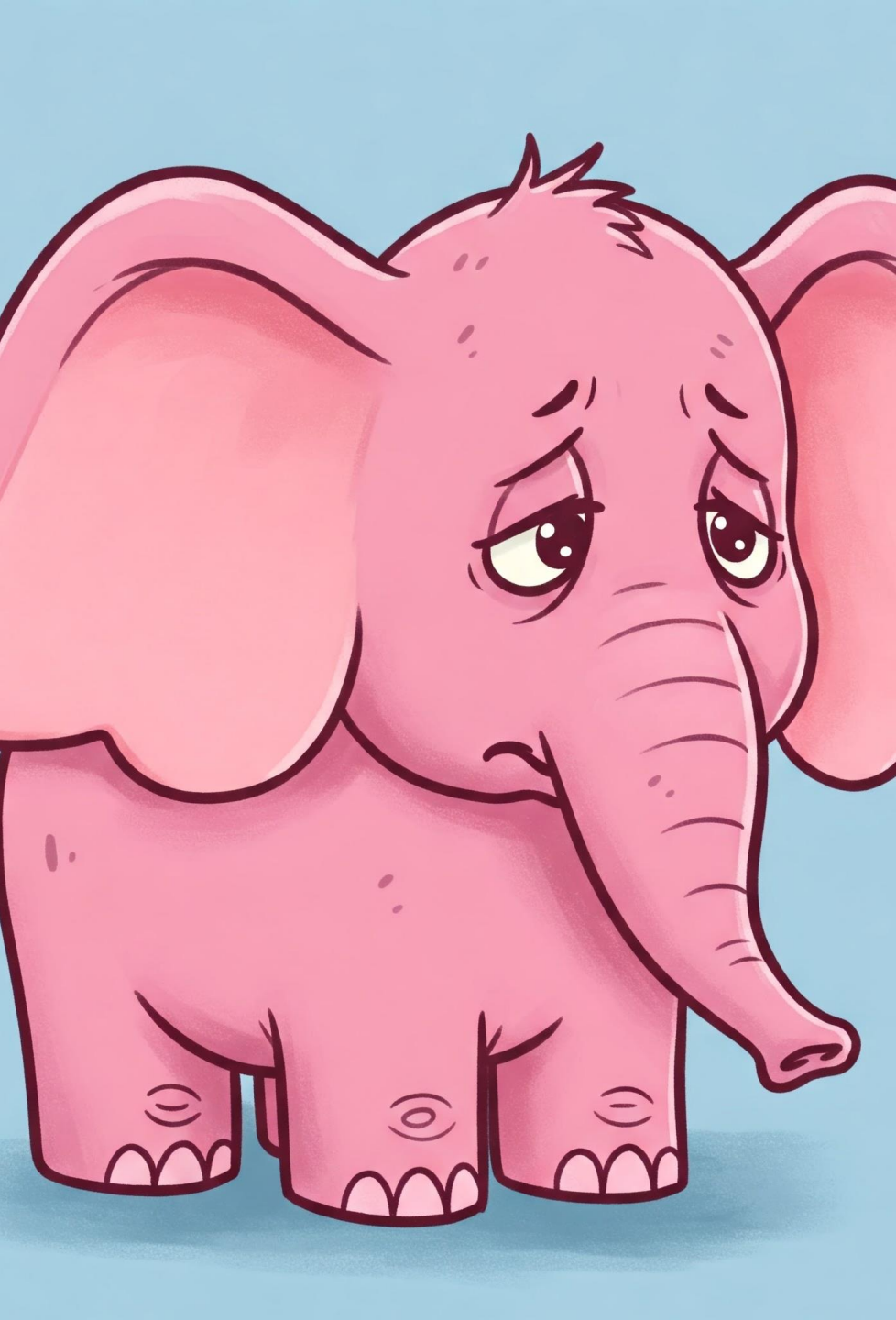
- Increased irritability or anger
- Periods of euphoria followed by depression
- Anxiety or paranoia



## Common Warning Signs of Substance Misuse

### **Changes in Personality:**

- Unexplained changes in behavior or attitude
- Lack of motivation
- Increased anxiety or fear



# Common warning Signs of Substance misuse

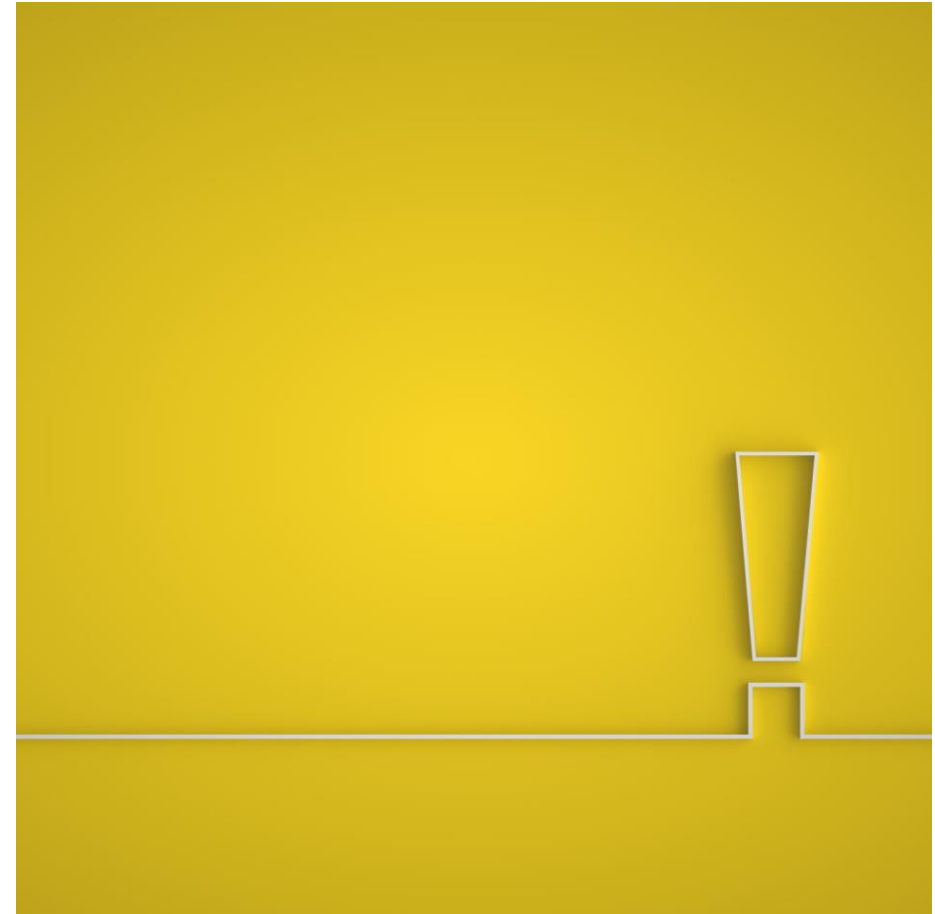
## **Cognitive Impairment:**

- Difficulty concentrating
- Memory problems
- Confusion

# Common warning Signs of Substance misuse

## **Cravings and Dependence:**

- Increased tolerance, needing more of a substance to get the same effect
- Experiencing strong cravings for the substance
- Continuing to use the substance despite negative consequences



# ABA / Hazelden- Betty Ford Study

(Published February, 2016 *Journal of Addiction Medicine*)

## Problematic Drinking\*

- 6.4% of entire U.S. population
- 21% of all licensed attorneys
- 32% of all attorneys under 30 yrs. old

\* Problematic drinking defined as hazardous, possible dependence



# HOW STRESSED ARE YOU ?

- My work requires me to do too much in too little time.
- I don't have enough time to spend with my family and friends.
- The people at my law firm or department are cold, unfriendly or rude.
- The physical environment is unpleasant.
- I deal with too many unreasonable and difficult people.



# HOW STRESSED ARE YOU ?

- My firm or department is too focused on profit.
- The physical environment is unpleasant.
- My work bores me.
- Billable hour quotas are a source of stress for me.
- I'm not good at what I do.
- I'm not making a positive contribution to society or the lives of others.
- What I am doing doesn't deserve respect /get enough respect.





# HOW STRESSED ARE YOU ?

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- I feel overly responsible for everything and everyone.
- I overanalyze things and am too cautious.
- I often feel depressed, defeated or hopeless.
- I often rely on alcohol or drugs to help me feel good.
- I think about quitting at least once a month.
- Occasionally, I think about suicide.

# Why Are Legal Professionals at High Risk of Mental Health & Substance Use Disorders?

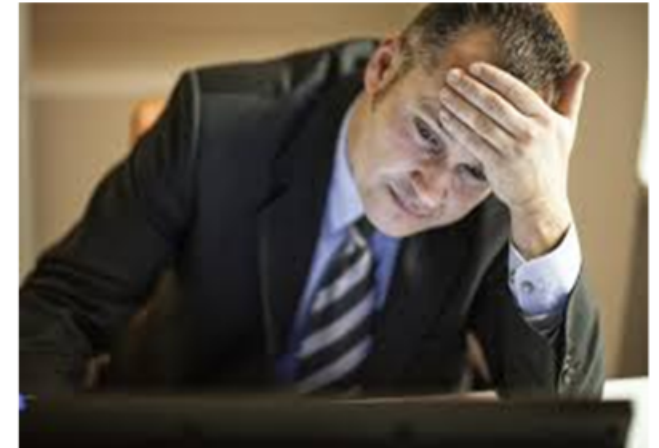
- Conflict driven and adversarial profession
- Emotional detachment
- Win-lose, black-white, often rigid thinking
- Perfectionism
- Excessive self-reliance



*These traits are great for a successful career but not so great for mental health.*

# Why Are Legal Professionals at High Risk of Mental Health & Substance Use Disorders?

- High expectations and accountability
- Lack of work-life balance
- Always on call to solve others problems
- High stress level are consistent predictors of SUD's and their severity.
- 67% of attorneys work more than 40 hours/week.
- Inherent pessimism



High Functioning ??

- When someone is colloquially termed a “high-functioning alcoholic”, they may be able to carry out daily tasks of living (such as job tasks, hygiene, childcare, paying bills, and participating in social activities) without exhibiting the full range of clinical impairments commonly associated with alcohol use disorders (AUD).

-American Addiction Centers



**DEFINING HIGH-FUNCTIONING**

# SIGNS OF HIGH FUNCTIONING ADDICTION

# Early Signs of Functional Addiction



## **Maintaining Responsibilities**

Individuals with functional addiction often continue to meet their daily obligations, creating a facade of normalcy.

## **Increased Secrecy**

A common early sign of functional addiction is a heightened level of secrecy surrounding substance use.

## **Mood Changes**

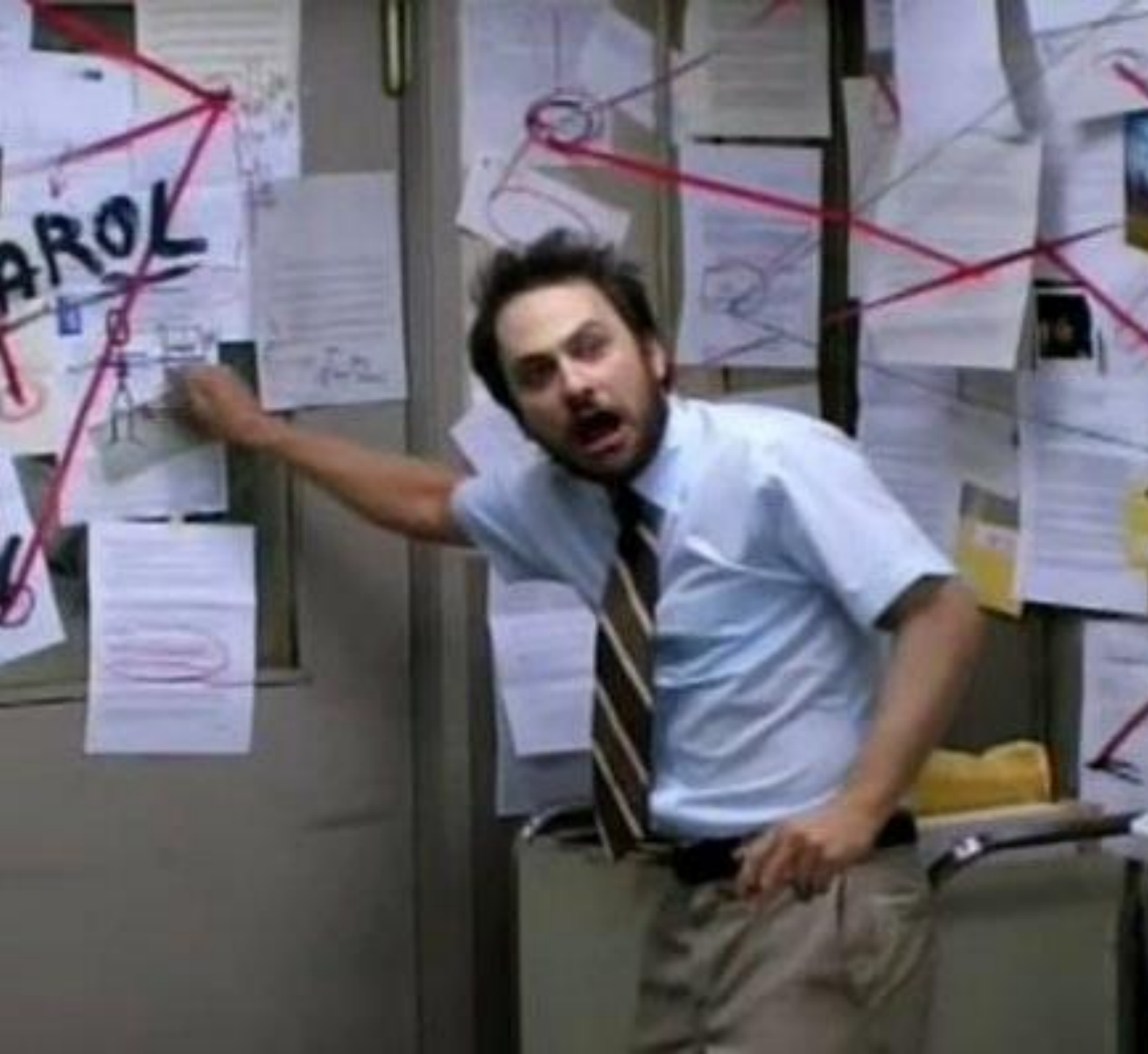
Mood swings can indicate functional addiction, showcasing emotional fluctuations related to substance reliance.

## **Coping with Stress**

A reliance on substances to cope with stress is a significant warning sign of functional addiction.



## MAINTAINING APPEARANCES

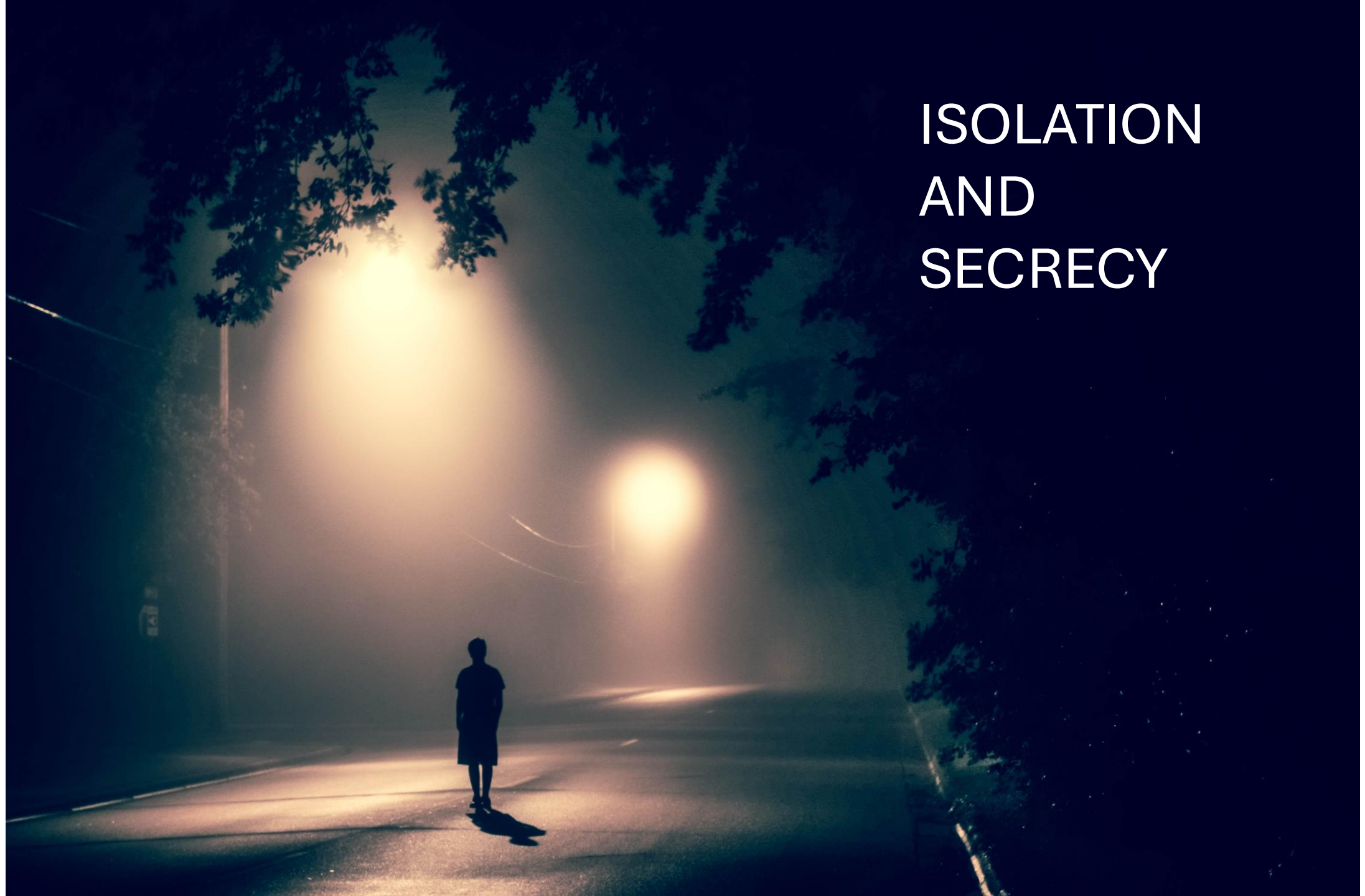


Rationalization  
and Denial

# Achievement Orientation

High functioning addicts are driven by an insatiable ambition to succeed, even in the face of their addiction. They possess an unwavering determination to accomplish their goals and excel, **often displaying impressive levels of productivity and achievement**. Paradoxically, their addiction becomes entangled with their pursuit of success, leading to a delicate balancing act between accomplishment and self-destruction.

# ISOLATION AND SECRECY



# ESCALATING TOLERENCE FOR SUBSTANCES



ABILITY TO  
MANAGE  
WITHDRAWAL

AKA “WHITE-  
KNUCKLING”





MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS AND  
FINANCIAL STABILITY –  
IN OTHER WORDS:  
KEEPING UP APPEARANCES



- DETERIORATING HEALTH
- INABILITY TO STOP

# Consequences of Addiction in the Legal Profession

# Ethical and Legal Implications



## **Consequences of Substance Misuse**

Substance misuse can lead to serious consequences for legal professionals, including ethical violations and potential loss of licensure.

## **Importance of Integrity**

Maintaining integrity is crucial for legal professionals, as it upholds the trust of clients and the justice system.

## **Awareness and Intervention**

Raising awareness and providing intervention resources are vital to address substance misuse in the legal profession.

# Effect on Mental and Physical Health



## **Mental Health Impact**

Addiction can lead to severe mental health issues, including anxiety and depression, affecting overall well-being.

## **Physical Health Consequences**

The effects of addiction extend to physical health, contributing to various health complications and ailments.

## **Need for Targeted Treatments**

Understanding addiction's effects is crucial for developing effective and targeted treatment approaches for individuals.

# Impact on Clients and Reputation



## **Trust in Legal Practice**

Trust is fundamental in legal practice. Addiction can erode clients' trust, jeopardizing professional relationships.



## **Reliability and Responsibility**

Reliability is crucial for legal professionals. Addiction can compromise their ability to fulfill responsibilities effectively.



## **Reputation Damage**

A legal professional's addiction can lead to significant damage to their overall reputation, affecting their practice.

# Impact on Career and Personal Life



## **Career Consequences**

Substance misuse can lead to significant repercussions on a legal professional's career, including disciplinary actions and loss of license.

## **Reputation Damage**

Legal professionals may face reputational harm due to substance misuse, impacting client trust and relationships.

## **Personal Relationships**

Substance misuse disorder can strain personal relationships, leading to conflicts with family and friends.



The Journey From Functioning to Non-Functioning

# Transition to Non-Functioning Addiction



## **Deteriorating Responsibilities**

In non-functioning addiction, individuals often struggle to manage daily responsibilities, affecting their work and personal life.

## **Relationship Strain**

Addiction can significantly deteriorate personal relationships, leading to isolation and conflict with family and friends.

## **Need for Intervention**

The transition to non-functioning addiction often necessitates urgent intervention and support from professionals and loved ones.

A grayscale photograph of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a striped shirt. She has her eyes closed and is covering both ears with her hands, a gesture often associated with denial or a desire to ignore something. The image is faded and serves as a background for the text.

What keeps many professionals from seeking or accepting the help they so desperately need ?

1. Shame and Embarrassment- STIGMA

1. Denial

2. Cunning ,insidious diseases

3. Enabling

## Dealing with *Denial*

- The most potent barrier
- Psychological defense mechanism
- Rationalize and minimize behavior
- Honestly believe they are under control
- I'm not one of "them" mentality

DENIAL  
✓



# THE CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE

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- Lawyers are trained to deal with and solve problems. Thus, it is most difficult for the attorney to seek help since by doing so he feels he is admitting failure.
- Complicating this problem further is the tendency of the attorney's or judge's peers to indulge in a conspiracy of silence (enabling), and lighten the normal stresses of our profession.

# What is the solution?



# Recognizing the Need for Help



## **Acknowledging the Problem**

The first step in recovery involves recognizing and admitting the existence of a problem. This awareness is essential for initiating change.

## **Importance of Seeking Help**

Recognizing the need for help encourages individuals to reach out for support and begin their journey towards recovery.

## **Initiating Change**

Once individuals recognize their need for help, they can take active steps toward initiating positive change in their lives.

# Building a Support Network



## **Importance of Support Networks**

A strong support network is vital for recovery, providing emotional and practical assistance through difficult times.

## **Role of Family and Friends**

Family and friends can offer love, encouragement, and understanding, helping individuals stay focused on their recovery goals.

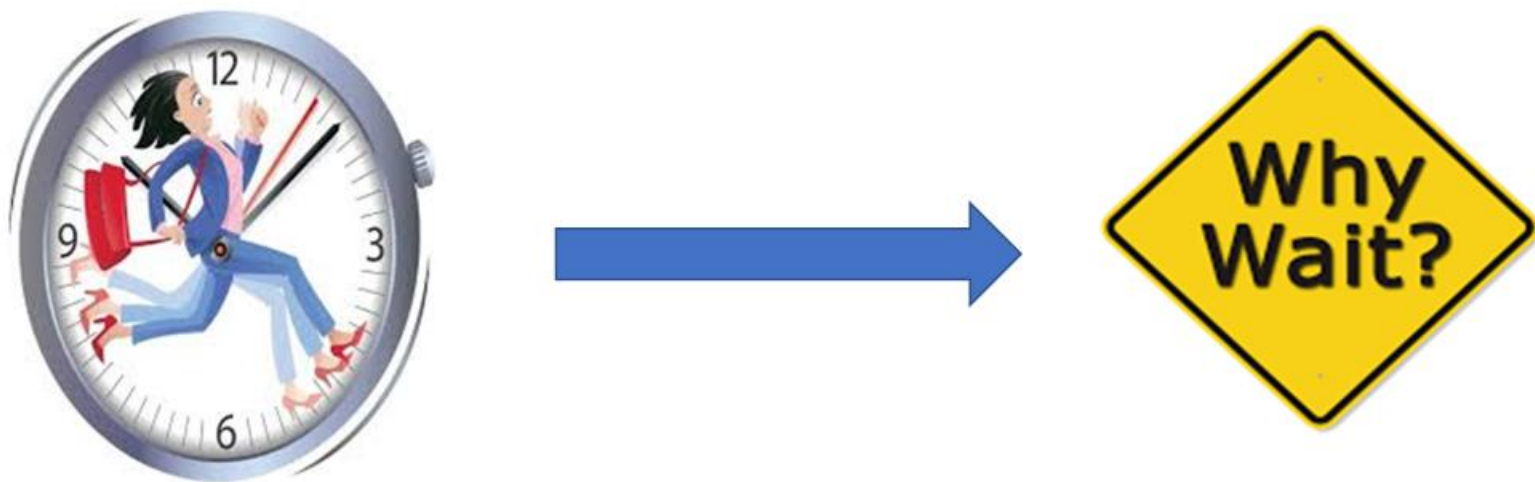
## **Therapists and Support Groups**

Therapists and support groups provide professional guidance and shared experiences that are crucial for maintaining sobriety.

What can YOU do ??



Although it is difficult, remember that your end goal is to help motivate the impaired lawyer to seek professional help they so desperately need.



**Remember, every month, every day,  
every *moment* is the opportunity  
to live a new cycle— we don't have to  
wait until a new year to start a cycle!  
Being a healthy lawyer is *part* of being  
a good lawyer.**

# Call the Lawyers Assistance Program in **YOUR** State

## **Directory of Lawyers Assistance Programs by State**

- [https://www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer\\_assistance/resources/lap\\_programs\\_by\\_state.html](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance/resources/lap_programs_by_state.html)

# How Can I Find Help Through LAP?

Free information  
and literature

Free evaluation by  
a healthcare  
professional

Free assistance  
with interventions

Peer/LCL staff  
support

Lawyer/Judge/Law  
Student-only  
support group  
Meetings

LCL Helpline

**1-888-999-1941**

**24/7 Confidential  
Support**

<https://www.lclpa.org/>