

Lawyers ASSISTANCE

By Dr. Angela White-Bazile, Esq.

IS IT OKAY TO NOT BE OKAY?

My mother's cancer has returned. My daughter, who is a sophomore, has been suspended from school. The children were late to school for the third time this week. The new dog relieved himself on the new carpet yet again. I forgot to pay the utility bill, and there is no Internet to finish that brief that is due in court tomorrow. Now I have a flat tire, AAA is unavailable for another two hours, and my meeting starts in an hour. I am beyond being overwhelmed and exhausted. I feel like I am about to have a nervous breakdown.

But when I arrive at work, it's *Good morning. How are you today? I'm fine.*

The reality is it has been a tough week for me, mentally and physically. I have dug myself into such a deep hole, and I do not know how to climb out. It seems that my current situation could not get any worse. I wake up daily thinking, how long will I worry? How long will I run from my emotions and pretend that emotional pain and turmoil do not exist? How much longer can I ignore my mental, physical and emotional exhaustion? How long will I feel such profound sadness in my heart?

This person could be your spouse, colleague, the judge hearing your case, or even you.

How long will we suffer in silence? We think we have to be strong all the time. We believe we are not allowed to cry or scream or admit that we are not okay. We mask when we are experiencing burnout, grief and loss, job dissatisfaction and family issues. We have not healed from traumatic childhoods and a tense relationship with a parent, family member, friend, co-worker or colleague. We have not healed from the rejection or failure we experienced years ago. We struggle with depression, anxiety, addictions and suicidal ideations. We crave love and at-



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tention. We keep pushing when we want to stop. There are days when we are depleted and have nothing to give. It is not only us who suffer when we do not deal with difficult emotions. Avoidance or denial can also affect the people around us by creating additional stress, frustration and resentment.

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, "1 in 5 U.S. adults experience mental illness each year," but only 46.2% of U.S. adults with mental illness received treatment in 2020.¹

Mental illnesses can affect people of any age, race, religion or income. Know that it is okay not to be okay. It is okay to ask for help. We are not always happy, positive and full of energy. You are not the only one who has felt desperate, terrified, bewildered and in immense pain. Suppressing emotions is unhealthy and can cause more pain and other mental or physical issues. We judge and shame ourselves more harshly than others due to the stigma surrounding mental and emotional health. Honest conversations need to occur to reduce the stigma and stereotypes, so no one feels ashamed or alone. Everyone needs a support system, but most struggle alone and do not seek help. No one wants to be viewed as weak, ineffective or "crazy" or jeopardize a career.

While it is okay not to be okay, it is not okay to stay not okay. Avoidance or denial will not solve anything. We do not have to have "it" all figured out. We are

allowed to change our minds. We are allowed to be selfish and take a break. We must learn to be patient with ourselves and not overanalyze every situation.

This message is a reminder to *slow down and be present in the moment.* Acknowledge your current feelings.

Along with asking for support from a friend or professional, do something you enjoy, such as spending time outdoors, listening to music, engaging in a recreational sport, playing with a pet, or meditating. Prioritize sleep. Spend less time on social media. Engage in something that energizes you and create spaces to relax and recharge. Prioritize your happiness.

Avoid drinking alcohol or using drugs, overeating, sleeping too much or overspending. Unhealthy coping techniques only offer temporary relief.

For additional wellness information and tips or to seek confidential, non-disciplinary help, contact the professional clinical staff at JLAP at (985)778-0571, email jlap@louisianajlap.com, or visit the website at: www.louisianajlap.com. The call costs nothing but could make a life-changing difference.

We are a CONFIDENTIAL Safe Haven of Healing committed to fostering healthy and competent lawyers, judges, law students and legal professionals.

FOOTNOTE

1. "Mental Health By The Numbers," National Alliance on Mental Illness, <https://www.nami.org/mhstats>.

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