

Mental Health First Aid:

Identifying Acute Mental Health Crises

Dr. Kristin Jones

Doctor of Health Science,
Licensed Mental Health Counselor

Founder, Jones Mindful Living
Founder, Jones Therapy and Coaching

Dalia Macdonald

Licensed Mental Health Counselor
Founder, Macdonald Consulting Group

What we will be discussing today

- Mental health in law
- Identifying Mental Health Problems
 - Concerning symptoms
 - When to get help
- Identifying a crisis
- Crisis survival skills

Mental Health Matters

- Mental health problems are a growing concern for the country and the world
- Mental health can have serious impacts on physical health, career performance, family life, relationships, and beyond
- Mental health problems can also become dangerous and life threatening in some circumstances
- Studies have found that mental health problems are prevalent in the legal profession

Mental Health in Law

In 2016, the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation and the ABA Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs conducted research on lawyer mental health impairment.

The study found the following:

- 28% suffered from depression
 - 48% reported depression in their legal career
- 20.6% had problematic drinking
 - In comparison to 11.8% of the highly educated workforce
- 19% had anxiety
 - 61% had anxiety in their legal career
- 11.5% of lawyers had suicidal thoughts in their legal career
 - 2.9% had self-injurious behavior and 0.7% had at least one suicide attempt

Mental Health in Law

- In 2020, the D.C. Bar and the California Lawyers Association examined mental health risk factors
- Findings included:
 - Almost half of attorneys experience symptoms of anxiety and depression
 - 30% with mild and 20% with moderate to severe anxiety or depression
 - Women experiencing worse mental health and have more problematic drinking
 - 25% of women and 17% of men contemplate leaving the profession due to mental health problems

Identifying Mental Health Problems

Anxiety

Depression

Suicidal
Ideation and
Self-Harm

Substance
Use Disorders

Eating
Disorders

Other
Concerning
Symptoms

Anxiety

Anxiety feels like an unpleasant, diffuse, and vague sense of apprehension

- Comes from your mind anticipating possible dangers that you might feel in a given circumstance
 - If you are not in physical danger in a moment, yet you are feeling something similar to fear, you are probably experiencing anxiety
- Anxiety does not tend to be a problem until it becomes chronic or interferes with your life enjoyment or performance
 - When problematic, it tends to be disconnected from reality and tends to amplify the actual potential danger of a situation

Anxiety

Symptoms:

- Feeling agitated, restless, wound up, or irritable
- Loss of energy
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty sleeping
- Difficulty controlling feelings of worry
- Panic attacks
- Muscular tension/twitches
- Increased heart rate, sweating, and trembling

When to get help:

- When there becomes a pattern of maladaptive behaviors (e.g. avoidance and withdrawal) used by the individual to avoid the anxiety-provoking entity or situation

Depression

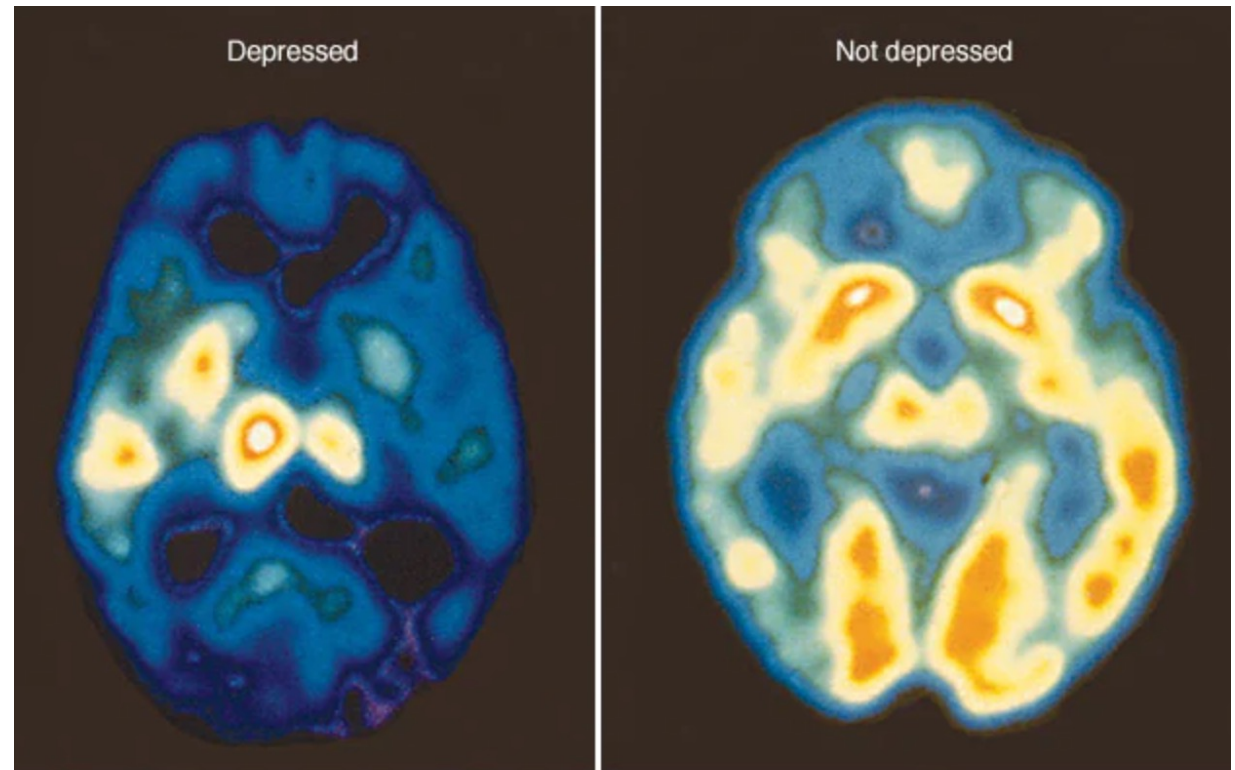
A persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest that negatively affects how you think, feel, and behave

- Symptoms:
 - Feelings of sadness, tearfulness, emptiness, and hopelessness
 - Irritability and frustration
 - Loss of interest or pleasure in most or all normal activities
 - Sleeping disturbances such as insomnia or oversleeping
 - Tiredness and lack of energy
 - Reduced appetite or increased cravings
 - Feelings of worthlessness, guilt, and shame
 - Fixation on past failures or self-blame
 - Slowed thinking, speaking, or body movements
 - Trouble thinking, concentrating, making decisions, and remembering things
 - Social withdrawal
 - Frequent or recurrent thoughts of death, suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts, or suicide

Depression

When to get help:

- When the depression interferes with daily living and your normal activities
- Feeling that life is not worth living
- **It is imperative to seek help from a mental health professional if you experience suicidal ideation, even if there is no plan**



© MAYO FOUNDATION FOR MEDICAL EDUCATION AND RESEARCH. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

PET scans were used to compare brain activity during periods of depression (left) with normal brain activity (right). An increase of blue and green colors, along with decreased white and yellow areas, shows decreased brain activity due to depression.

Suicidal Thoughts and Self- Harm

- Suicidal Ideation
 - Suicidal thoughts, ideas, or ruminating about ending one's life
 - Passive suicidal ideation: a desire to die, but no plan
 - Active suicidal ideation: a plan to commit suicide and may be in the process of getting their affairs in order
- Self-harm
 - Intentionally harming yourself
 - Increases risk of suicide
 - Examples include cutting, burning, hitting yourself or objects (like a wall or the floor)

Suicidal Thoughts and Self- Harm

- When to get help:
 - Some things to look for are:
 - **It is imperative to seek help from a mental health professional if you experience suicidal ideation, even if there is no plan**
 - Talking about feeling hopeless and having no reason to live
 - Feeling trapped or being in overwhelming pain
 - Feeling like a burden to others
 - Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
 - Behaving recklessly
 - Withdrawing and feeling isolated
 - Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
 - Displaying extreme mood swings

Substance Use Disorder

Symptoms in which
an individual
continues using the
substance despite
significant
substance-use-
related problems

Concerning symptoms

- An inability to stop and the need to use the substance every day (sometimes multiple times per day)
 - Having intense urges that block out other thoughts
 - Building a tolerance and needing to use more of the substance to get the same effect
 - Changes in mood, appetite, and sleep
 - Continuing to use despite negative consequences
 - Denial of there being a problem
 - Engaging in risky behaviors
 - Feeling preoccupied with the substance or behavior
 - Legal and financial problems
 - Losing interest in things you used to enjoy
-
- Other addictive behaviors: sex, gambling, shopping

Substance Use Disorder

When to get help:

- Distress or impairment related to the substance or behavior
- Increased time spent on activities obtaining, using, or recovering from substance use
- Use of a substance in a potentially hazardous situation
- Psychological problems due to recurrent substance abuse
- Craving the substance at an increase in the amount of substance used over time (i.e., tolerance)
- Difficulty reducing the amount of substance used despite a desire to reduce/stop using and/or withdrawal symptoms

Eating Disorders

The presence of persistent feeding and eating disturbances.

- Concerning symptoms
 - Repeated regurgitation of food
 - Chronic avoidance of, or lack of interest in, eating to a degree constituting significant weight loss or nutritional deficiency
 - Refusal to maintain a minimally normal body weight, intense fear of gaining weight, and significantly distorted perception of the shape and size of one's body
 - Binge eating and inappropriate compensatory methods to prevent weight gain (e.g. induced vomiting, misuse of laxatives and diuretics).
- When to get help:
 - If you experience any of the above symptoms

Other Concerning Symptoms

- Sudden changes in mood, sleep, or behavior
- Extreme self-criticism and perfectionism
- The feeling of losing touch with reality or things not seeming real
- Disturbing and intrusive thoughts
- Obsessive thinking and compulsive behavior
- Engaging in high risk or impulsive behaviors
- Flashbacks or nightmares
- Feelings of grandiosity or paranoia

It is important to seek consultation by a mental health professional if you experience any of these behaviors

***** Some individuals experiencing mental health problems experience “anosognosia” which is a brain-based lack of awareness, where essentially the individual is unable to recognize that they are ill**

Mental Health Resources

- 988 Suicide and Crisis Life Line
 - Nation wide, Call or text, available 24 hours per day, confidential
- Providers through insurance
 - Contact insurance for a list of in-network mental health professionals including psychiatrists
- Mental Health provider directories:
 - Psychology Today, Theravive, Good Therapy, Zen Care
- Affordable telehealth: BetterHelp
- For mental health emergencies, call 911 or visit your local emergency room

Crisis Survival Skills

Make it through a crisis without making things worse

What is a crisis?

YOU ARE IN A CRISIS when the situation is:

- Highly stressful
- Short-term (it won't last a long time)
- Brings up intense emotion
- Creates intense urgency to resolve the crisis now
- Urgency to use destructive coping mechanisms or behaviors that may lead to negative consequences

How a crisis is different from regular emotion dysregulation

- Intense sense of urgency
- Difficulty with the following:
 - Problem solving
 - Logical thought/reasoning
 - Recognizing consequences
- Difficulty functioning well and completing responsibilities

Crisis Survival Skills

These skills help you to tolerate painful situations, urges, and emotions

- Not for mild/moderate or everyday challenges.

When to Use Crisis Survival Skills?

You are feeling intense pain that can't be helped quickly

You have urgency to act on your emotions but know it will only make things worse (short-term or long-term)

You feel overwhelmed by emotion, and you need to stay regulated

You are feeling emotionally overwhelmed and yet you need to meet your demands or responsibilities

Emotional intensity is extreme, but problems can't be solved right away

Don't Use Crisis Survival Skills for:

Low to moderate
intensity
emotions.

Everyday
problems.

Solving all your
life problems.

Creating a
meaningful life.

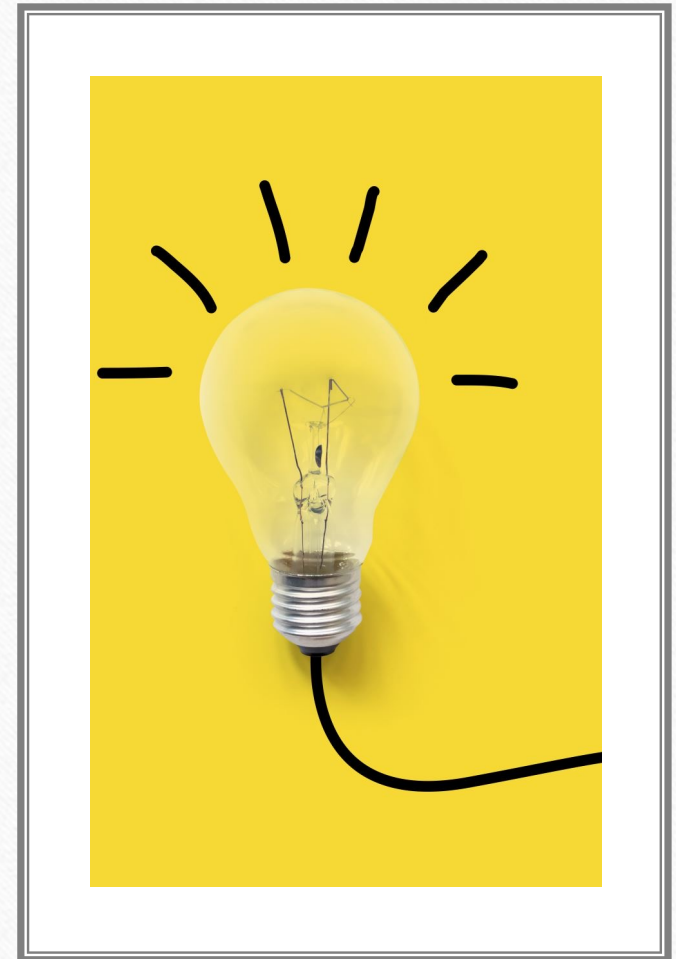
If you keep
running into
crisis
situations...

If you keep encountering crisis situations or high distress, there is probably something within you or in your life that needs to be tended to:

- Is there unresolved emotion or grief that you need to process?
- Is there unresolved trauma that needs to be healed?
- Is there an unresolved life situation that needs to be dealt with?
- Are you having difficulty accepting reality?
- Are you avoiding a situation that needs problem-solving?

Fundamental Crisis Survival Skills

From Dialectical Behavior Therapy Distress Tolerance Skills



Things to keep in mind

- ******The goal is to make it through the distress without making things worse**
- **It is most effective to cope ahead for emotional overwhelm**
 - The brain has difficulty with problem solving and logical thought during distress
 - Have a plan ready and mentally rehearse for future distress
- **Don't judge or criticize yourself**
 - Accept that you are feeling emotional overwhelm and focus on doing what works to be effective
 - Judgement and criticism can intensify distress and will not help the situation
- **Don't try to figure out "why" the distress is happening**
 - Wait until you are more emotionally regulated to try to analyze the situation

TIPP:

Temperature, Intense Exercise, Paced Breathing,
Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Use TIPP when emotional arousal is very HIGH!
Changes physiology to bring emotional intensity down quickly

Use when:

- You are completely emotionally overwhelmed
- Your brain is not processing information
- You are at risk of using a problem behavior to cope

TIPP:

Changes physiology to bring emotional intensity down quickly

Temperature

- With cold
 - Cold water to the face reduces emotional intensity quickly
 - Targets parasympathetic nervous system by decreasing heart rate
 - Ice dive: Put your face in a bowl of ice water
 - Hold ice packs to face, neck, eyes, chest
 - Splash cold water on your face
- Very warm, hot shower

Intense Exercise

- 10-30 minutes
- A short 2-minute burst can help too!
- **Don't over do it!**

Caution: Ice water decreases your heart rate rapidly. Intense exercise will increase heart rate. If you have a heart or medical condition, lowered base heart rate due to medications, take a beta-blocker, or have an eating disorder, consult your health care provider before using these skills. Avoid ice water if allergic to the cold.

TIPP:

Changes
physiology to
bring emotional
intensity down
quickly

Paced Breathing

- Slow steady breathing
- Square breath
- 4/6 breath
 - Extend exhale longer than inhale
- Do this for one to two minutes to reduce intensity of emotion

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- Tense and release each body part, one at a time, from your feet to your head
- Inhale and tense (5 seconds), then release as you exhale; relax each muscle all the way
- Observe the tension; Observe the difference when relaxed

Distraction (ACCEPTS)

- Shift your focus away from what is prompting the emotion
- Distracting yourself from what is bringing up distress can help your emotion to reduce

Activities

Contributing

Comparisons

Emotions

Pushing Away

Thoughts

Sensations

Self-Soothe through the Senses

- **Mindfully soothing yourself through your five senses**

- Sight

- Smell

- Taste

- Touch

- Sound

Why self-soothe?

- Self-soothing is all about being nurturing, gentle and comforting to yourself.
- Engaging in soothing and nurturing sensations can provide comfort and relief from stress and emotional pain (physical pain too)
 - Reduce emotion mind and urges to act on impulses
 - Help to tolerate pain without making things worse
- Learning how to soothe yourself is an important skill
 - Some people overly rely on others for soothing so learning to self-soothe is very self-empowering
 - Some people have difficulty self-soothing because they don't feel deserving of it or think it is "weak"
- Use self-soothing in everyday life to help soothe yourself and balance your nervous system

IMPROVE the Moment

Purposefully bringing positive into the situation

Improving the quality of the present moment to make it more tolerable

Imagery

Meaning

Prayer

Relaxation

One thing in
the Moment

Vacation

Encouragement

Pros and Cons

Use pros and cons when you have to decide between different courses of action:

- Use when an urge in a crisis is very strong and acting on the urge will make things *worse* in the long term
- Using pros and cons can help you connect to logic, reason, and consequences, which is very difficult when highly emotional

Pros and Cons of Acting on Urges

	Pros	Cons
Acting on Crisis Urges	Pros of Acting on impulsive urges, giving up, or avoiding what you need to do. _____ _____	Cons of Acting on impulsive urges, giving up, or avoiding what you need to do. _____ _____
Resisting Crisis Urges	Pros of Resisting impulsive urges, giving up, or avoiding what you need to do. _____ _____	Cons of Resisting impulsive urges, giving up, or avoiding what you need to do. _____ _____

Pros & Cons

Things to remember

01

Remember to focus on short-term and long-term goals, the light at the end of the tunnel

02

Remind yourself of times in the past when pain has ended

03

Think of positive consequences of tolerating the distress and not acting on crisis urges

04

Consider all the negative consequences of not tolerating your current distress



Urge Management

High intensity emotion makes action feel urgent!

- Refrain from acting if you are experiencing intense emotion
- Use this strategy when you experience urges that may cause negative consequences for you in the short-term or long-term
- **Most importantly, when you feel an urgeDELAY!**
- **Urges only last at most 20-30 minutes**
 - **The urge will eventually pass, whether you act on it or not.**
- If you have a sense of "knowing" what you need to do and it feels urgent, wait until you are no longer emotional to act

Urge Management Protocol

1. **Observe and describe the urge nonjudgementally**
2. **Set a timer for 15 minutes** and make a commitment not to act on the urge during that time
3. **While you wait...**
 - Use TIPP to reduce emotional intensity quickly
 - Use distraction skills to move your attention away from the urge (ACCEPTS)
 - Use other skills like self-soothe, pros and cons, or IMPROVE

Urge Management Protocol Continued....

4. After the urge and emotional intensity has reduced a bit, do pros and cons for acting on the urge and pros and cons for not acting on the urge

5. After the 15 minutes is up, observe the intensity of your urge

- If the urge has decreased or passed, move on with your day
- If it is still high, repeat this strategy again until the urge has reduced.
- The goal is to be effective, no to berate yourself

***Keep in mind that you may need to do some self-soothing, problem-solving, or other skills to deal with the emotion or situation that brought up the urge in the first place, after the urge has passed

Concluding Statements

- Mental health problems are common among those in the legal profession
- Mental health can have serious impacts on your physical health, career performance, family life, and those around you
- **Make sure not to dismiss mental health problems and seek help from a mental health professional if you notice any concerning symptoms**
- Use effective coping strategies to deal with crises instead of engaging in maladaptive coping which may lead to negative and destructive consequences

Questions?

Contact information:

Kristin Jones: kjones@jonestherapyandcoaching.com

Website: www.jonesmindfulliving.com and
www.jonestherapyandcoaching.com

Dalia Macdonald: dmacdonald@macdonaldcg.com

Website: www.macdonaldcg.com