How to Thrive in the Practice of Law

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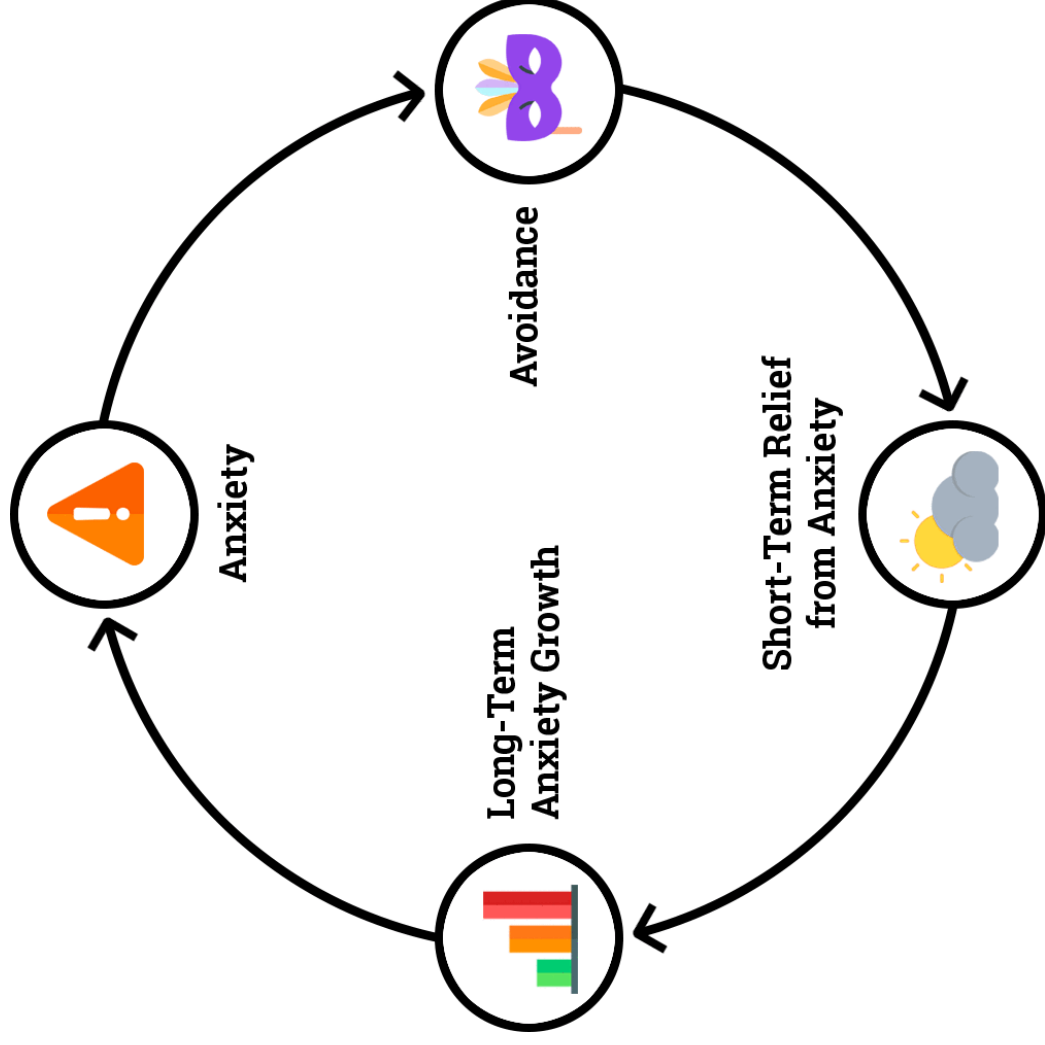
⚠ Anxiety

An anxiety-producing situation leads to uncomfortable symptoms such as worry, fear, a racing heart, sweating, or a feeling of being overwhelmed.

Avoidance

Uncomfortable symptoms are controlled by avoiding the anxiety-producing situation. Examples of avoidance include:

- Skipping class to avoid giving a presentation
- Using drugs or alcohol to numb feelings
- Procrastinating on challenging tasks

Short-Term Relief from Anxiety

Avoidance of the anxiety-producing situation gives an immediate sense of relief. The symptoms of anxiety lessen, but only temporarily.

Long-Term Anxiety Growth

The fear that initially led to avoidance worsens, and the brain learns that when the anxiety-producing situation is avoided, the symptoms go away. As a result, the symptoms of anxiety will be worse the next time, and avoidance is more likely.
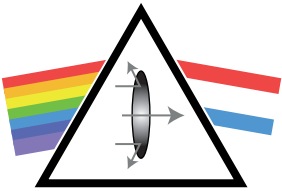
Unhelpful Thinking Styles

All or nothing thinking

Sometimes called 'black and white thinking'.

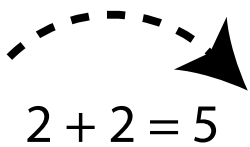*If I'm not perfect I have failed.*

Either I do it right or not at all.

Over-generalizing

"everything is always rubbish."

"nothing good ever happens."

Seeing a pattern based upon a single event, or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw.

Mental filter

Only paying attention to certain types of evidence.

Noticing our failures but not seeing our successes.

Disqualifying the positive

Discounting the good things that have happened or that you have done for some reason or another.

That doesn't count

Jumping to conclusions

2 + 2 = 5

There are two key types of jumping to conclusions:
• **Mind reading** (imagining we know what others are thinking).
• **Fortune telling** (predicting the future).

Magnification (catastrophizing) & minimization

Blowing things out of proportion (catastrophizing), or inappropriately shrinking something to make it seem less important.

Emotional reasoning

Assuming that because we feel a certain way what we think must be true.
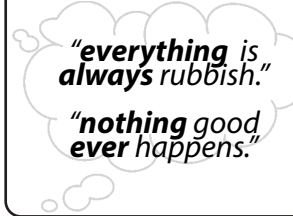
I feel embarrassed so I must be an idiot.

should must

Using critical words like 'should', 'must', or 'ought' can make us feel guilty, or like we have already failed.

If we apply 'shoulds' to other people the result is often frustration.

Labeling

STUPID

Assigning labels to ourselves or other people.

I'm a loser.
I'm completely useless.
They're such an idiot.

Personalization

"this is my fault."

Blaming yourself or taking responsibility for something that wasn't completely your fault.

Conversely, blaming other people for something that was your fault.

PSYCHOLOGY**TO**LS®

Unhelpful Thinking Styles

	All or nothing thinking	Thinking in extremes. For example, something is either 100% good or bad.
	Catastrophizing	Jumping to the worst possible conclusion.
"everything is always rubbish" *"nothing good ever happens"*	**Over-generalizing**	Seeing a pattern based upon a single event.
	Mental filter	Only paying attention to certain types of evidence ("that doesn't count").
	Disqualifying the positive	Discounting positive information or twisting a positive into a negative.
2 + 2 = 5	**Jumping to conclusions**	Mind reading or predicting the future.
"I can't stand it"	**Low frustration tolerance**	Saying things like "this is too difficult", "this is unbearable" or "I can't stand it".
	Minimization	Discounting the importance of something.
	Emotional reasoning	Assuming that because we feel a certain way our hunch must be true.
SHOULD **MUST**	**Demands**	Using words like 'should', 'must', and 'ought'.
STUPID	**Labeling**	Assigning labels to ourselves or others ("I'm rubbish").
"this is my fault"	**Personalization**	Taking too much or too little responsibility.

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Prompts For Challenging Negative Thinking

Use the list of prompts below to help you assess the truthfulness of your negative thinking.

Evidence
Am I confusing a fact with an opinion?
What is the evidence for the negative thought?
What is the evidence against the negative thought?
Are there any small things that contradict the thought? Perhaps things that I am discounting as unimportant?

Helpfulness
Are these thoughts helpful to me?
Will thoughts like this help me to achieve my goals?
Do thoughts like this truly have my best interests at heart?

Alternative perspectives
If a good friend knew I were having this thought, what would they say to me?
If someone I loved had this thought, what would I tell them?
What would Batman say to me about this thought?
Am I making the mistake of assuming my perspective on this issue is the only one?
If I wasn't interested in punishing or condemning myself would I think in this way?
Ten years from now, if I look back on this situation, will I look at it any differently?

Thinking biases
Am I thinking in all-or-nothing terms? (Am I using words like 'always' or 'never'?)
Am I catastrophizing?
Am I jumping to any conclusions that are not completely justified by the evidence?
Am I holding myself to a higher standard than I would hold other people?
Am I labelling myself?
Am I focusing on my weaknesses and minimizing my strengths?
Am I making unreasonable demands? (Am I using words like 'should', 'must', or 'ought'?)
Am I condemning myself totally on the basis of a single event?
Am I blaming myself for something over which I do not have complete control?
When I am not feeling this way, do I still think about this type of situation in the same way?

PSYCHOLOGYTOOLS®

Prompts For Challenging Negative Thinking

Use the list of prompts below to help you assess the accuracy of your thinking.

What is your negative thought:

Evidence
[ ] Am I confusing a fact with an opinion?
[ ] What is the evidence for the negative thought?
[ ] What is the evidence against the negative thought?
[ ] Are there any small things that contradict the thought? Perhaps things that I am discounting as unimportant?

Helpfulness
[ ] Are these thoughts helpful to me?
[ ] Will thoughts like this help me to achieve my goals?
[ ] Do thoughts like this truly have my best interests at heart?

Alternative perspectives
[ ] If a good friend knew I were having this thought, what would they say to me?
[ ] If someone I loved had this thought, what would I tell them?
[ ] What would Batman say to me about this thought?
[ ] Am I making the mistake of assuming my perspective on this issue is the only one?
[ ] If I wasn't interested in punishing or condemning myself would I think in this way?
[ ] Ten years from now, if I look back on this situation, will I look at it any differently?

Thinking biases
[ ] Am I thinking in all-or-nothing terms? (Am I using words like 'always' or 'never'?)
[ ] Am I catastrophizing?
[ ] Am I jumping to any conclusions that are not completely justified by the evidence?
[ ] Am I holding myself to a higher standard than I would hold other people?
[ ] Am I labelling myself?
[ ] Am I focusing on my weaknesses and minimizing my strengths?
[ ] Am I making unreasonable demands? (Am I using words like 'should', 'must', or 'ought'?)
[ ] Am I condemning myself totally on the basis of a single event?
[ ] Am I blaming myself for something over which I do not have complete control?
[ ] When I am not feeling this way, do I still think about this type of situation in the same way?

Write an alternative thought now:

PSYCHOLOGYTOLS ®

What are Personal Boundaries?

Personal boundaries are the limits and rules we set for ourselves within relationships. A person with healthy boundaries can say "no" to others when they want to, but they are also comfortable opening themselves up to intimacy and close relationships.

A person who always keeps others at a distance (whether emotionally, physically, or otherwise) is said to have *rigid boundaries*. Alternatively, someone who tends to get too involved with others has *porous boundaries*.

Common traits of rigid, porous, and healthy boundaries.		
Rigid Boundaries	**Porous Boundaries**	**Healthy Boundaries**
Avoids intimacy and close relationships. Unlikely to ask for help. Has few close relationships. Very protective of personal information. May seem detached, even with romantic partners. Keeps others at a distance to avoid the possibility of rejection.	Overshares personal information. Difficulty saying "no" to the requests of others. Overinvolved with others' problems. Dependent on the opinions of others. Accepting of abuse or disrespect. Fears rejection if they do not comply with others.	Values own opinions. Doesn't compromise values for others. Shares personal information in an appropriate way (does not over or under share). Knows personal wants and needs, and can communicate them. Accepting when others say "no" to them.

Most people have a mix of different boundary types. For example, someone could have healthy boundaries at work, porous boundaries in romantic relationships, and a mix of all three types with their family.

The appropriateness of boundaries depends heavily on setting. What's appropriate to say when you're out with friends might not be appropriate when you're at work.

Some cultures have very different expectations when it comes to boundaries. For example, in some cultures it's considered wildly inappropriate to express emotions publicly. In other cultures, emotional expression is encouraged.

What are Personal Boundaries?

Types of Boundaries

Physical boundaries refer to personal space and physical touch. Healthy physical boundaries include an awareness of what's appropriate, and what's not, in various settings and types of relationships (hug, shake hands, or kiss?). Physical boundaries may be violated if someone touches you when you don't want them to, or when they invade your personal space (for example, rummaging through your bedroom).

Intellectual boundaries refer to thoughts and ideas. Healthy intellectual boundaries include respect for others' ideas, and an awareness of appropriate discussion (should we talk about the weather, or politics?). Intellectual boundaries are violated when someone dismisses or belittles another person's thoughts or ideas.

Emotional boundaries refer to a person's feelings. Healthy emotional boundaries include limitations on when to share, and when not to share, personal information. For example, gradually sharing personal information during the development of a relationship, as opposed to revealing everything to everyone. Emotional boundaries are violated when someone criticizes, belittles, or invalidates another person's feelings.

Sexual boundaries refer to the emotional, intellectual, and physical aspects of sexuality. Healthy sexual boundaries involve mutual understanding and respect of limitations and desires between sexual partners. Sexual boundaries can be violated with unwanted sexual touch, pressure to engage in sexual acts, leering, or sexual comments.

Material boundaries refer to money and possessions. Healthy material boundaries involve setting limits on what you will share, and with whom. For example, it may be appropriate to lend a car to a family member, but probably not to someone you met this morning. Material boundaries are violated when someone steals or damages another person's possessions, or when they pressure them to give or lend them their possessions.

Time boundaries refer to how a person uses their time. To have healthy time boundaries, a person must set aside enough time for each facet of their life such as work, relationships, and hobbies. Time boundaries are violated when another person demands too much of another's time.

Boundary Exploration

Think about a person, or a group of people, with whom you struggle to set healthy boundaries. This could mean that your boundaries are too rigid (you keep this person at a distance), too porous (you open up too much), or there's some other problem that isn't so easily labeled.

Who do you struggle to set healthy boundaries with? (e.g. "my husband" or "coworkers")

_____

In your relationship with the person you listed above, how are your boundaries in each of the following categories? Add a check in the appropriate column for each boundary category.

Boundary Category	Porous	Rigid	Healthy	Other
Physical Boundaries				
Intellectual Boundaries				
Emotional Boundaries				
Sexual Boundaries				
Material Boundaries				
Time Boundaries				

Take a moment to imagine what it will be like when you begin to establish healthy boundaries with this person. If your boundaries are too rigid, that might mean opening up. If they're porous, it might mean setting limits and saying "no" when you don't want to do something.

What are some specific actions you can take to improve your boundaries?

How do you think the other person will respond to these changes?

How do you think your life will be different once you've established healthy boundaries?

What are Your Values?

The list of values below is not exhaustive, but it's designed to get you thinking about your own. Which values on the list are most important to you? Pick your top three and if something comes to mind that is not on the list, write it down.

Acceptance	Faith/Religion	Mindfulness
Accountability	Family	Nature
Adventure	Freedom	Openness
Art or Music	Friendship	Patience
Athletics	Fun	Peace/Non-violence
Celebration	Generosity	Personal Growth
Challenge	Gratitude	Pets/Animals
Collaboration	Happiness	Politics
Commitment	Hard Work	Positive Influence
Community	Harmony	Practicality
Compassion	Health	Problem-Solving
Competence	Helping Others	Reliability
Cooperation	Honesty	Resourcefulness
Courage	Honour	Self-Compassion
Creativity	Humour	Self-Reliance
Curiosity	Independence	Simplicity/Thrift
Discipline	Innovation	Strength
Discovery	Integrity	Tradition
Efficiency	Interdependence	Trust
Enthusiasm	Joy	Willingness
Equality	Leadership	Wisdom
Ethical Action	Lifelong Learning	
Excellence	Love	
Fairness	Loyalty	

Setting Boundaries

Personal boundaries are the limits and rules we set for ourselves within relationships. A person with healthy boundaries can say "no" to others when they want to, but they are also comfortable opening themselves up to intimacy and close relationships.

Know Your Boundaries

Boundaries should be based on your values, or the things that are important to you. For example, if you value spending time with family, set firm boundaries about working late.

Your boundaries are yours, and yours alone. Many of your boundaries might align with those who are close to you, but others will be unique.

Know your boundaries *before* entering a situation. This will make it less likely you'll do something you're not comfortable with.

What to Say

You always have the right to say "no". When doing so, express yourself clearly and without ambiguity so there is no doubt about what you want.

"I'm not comfortable with this"	"Please don't do that"	"Not at this time"
"I can't do that for you"	"This doesn't work for me"	"I've decided not to"
"This is not acceptable"	"I'm drawing the line at ___"	"I don't want to do that"

What to Do

Use Confident Body Language
Face the other person, make eye contact, and use a steady tone of voice at an appropriate volume (not too quiet, and not too loud).

Be Respectful
Avoid yelling, using put-downs, or giving the silent treatment. It's okay to be firm, but your message will be better received if you are respectful.

Plan Ahead
Think about what you want to say, and how you will say it, before entering a difficult discussion. This can help you feel more confident about your position.

Compromise
When appropriate, listen and consider the needs of the other person. You never *have* to compromise, but give-and-take is part of any healthy relationship.

Setting Boundaries

Instructions: Respond to the following practice questions as if you were really in each situation. Think about the language *you* would use to firmly state your boundary.

✔ Examples

Situation: You notice your roommate has been eating your food in the fridge. You never discussed plans to share food, and don't want them eating what you bought.

Response: "I'd like to keep our food separate. If there's something of mine that you want, please ask me before taking it."

Situation: Your friend calls you at 11 pm to discuss issues she is having with her boyfriend. You need to wake up at 6 am.

Response: "I can tell you're upset. I want to talk to you, but I need to go to bed. Maybe we can talk tomorrow afternoon."

🎯 Practice

Situation: You invited a friend over for the evening, but now it's getting late. You would like to get ready for bed, but your friend seems unaware of how late it is.

Response:

Situation: A good friend asks you out on a date. You are not interested in being more than friends. You would like to let them down clearly, but gently.

Response:

Setting Boundaries

Situation: You missed several days of work due to a medical condition. When you get back, a coworker asks what happened. You feel this information is personal, and do not want to share.

Response:

Situation: Your brother asks if you can watch his two young children on Saturday morning. You already have plans.

Response:

Situation: Your coworker is upset about their recent performance review. They start yelling and slamming their fist on their desk. This is making you very uncomfortable.

Response:

Situation: A salesperson comes to your door during dinner. You try to politely show disinterest, but they keep giving their sales pitch. You want to get back to dinner.

Response:

Coping Skills
Anxiety

Deep Breathing

Deep breathing is a simple technique that's excellent for managing emotions. Not only is deep breathing effective, it's also discreet and easy to use at any time or place.

Sit comfortably and place one hand on your abdomen. Breathe in through your nose, deeply enough that the hand on your abdomen rises. Hold the air in your lungs, and then exhale slowly through your mouth, with your lips puckered as if you are blowing through a straw. The secret is to go slow: Time the inhalation (4s), pause (4s), and exhalation (6s). Practice for 3 to 5 minutes.

4s Inhale → **4s** Hold → **6s** Exhale

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

By tensing and relaxing the muscles throughout your body, you can achieve a powerful feeling of relaxation. Additionally, progressive muscle relaxation will help you spot anxiety by teaching you to recognize feelings of muscle tension.

Sit back or lie down in a comfortable position. For each area of the body listed below, you will tense your muscles tightly, but not to the point of strain. Hold the tension for 10 seconds, and pay close attention to how it feels. Then, release the tension, and notice how the feeling of relaxation differs from the feeling of tension.

Feet	Curl your toes tightly into your feet, then release them.
Calves	Point or flex your feet, then let them relax.
Thighs	Squeeze your thighs together tightly, then let them relax.
Torso	Suck in your abdomen, then release the tension and let it fall.
Back	Squeeze your shoulder blades together, then release them.
Shoulders	Lift and squeeze your shoulders toward your ears, then let them drop.
Arms	Make fists and squeeze them toward your shoulders, then let them drop.
Hands	Make a fist by curling your fingers into your palm, then relax your fingers.
Face	Scrunch your facial features to the center of your face, then relax.
Full Body	Squeeze all muscles together, then release all tension.

Coping Skills
Anxiety

Challenging Irrational Thoughts

Anxiety can be magnified by irrational thoughts. For example, the thoughts that "something bad will happen" or "I will make a mistake" might lack evidence, but still have an impact on how you feel. By examining the evidence and challenging these thoughts, you can reduce anxiety.

Put thoughts on trial. Choose a thought that has contributed to your anxiety. Gather evidence in support of your thought (*verifiable facts only*), and against your thought. Compare the evidence and determine whether your thought is accurate or not.

Use Socratic questioning. Question the thoughts that contribute to your anxiety. Ask yourself:

"Is my thought based on facts or feelings?"

"How would my best friend see this situation?"

"How likely is it that my fear will come true?"

"What's *most likely* to happen?"

"If my fear comes true, will it still matter in a week? A month? A year?"

Imagery

Your thoughts have the power to change how you feel. If you think of something sad, it's likely you'll start to feel sad. The opposite is also true: When you think of something positive and calming, you feel relaxed. The imagery technique harnesses this power to reduce anxiety.

Think of a place that you find comforting. It could be a secluded beach, your bedroom, a quiet mountaintop, or even a loud concert. For 5 to 10 minutes, use all your senses to imagine this setting in great detail. Don't just think fleetingly about this place--really imagine it.

What do you see around you? What do you notice in the distance? Look all around to take in all your surroundings. Look for small details you would usually miss.

What sounds can you hear? Are they soft or loud? Listen closely to everything around you. Keep listening to see if you notice any distant sounds.

Are you eating or drinking something enjoyable? What is the flavor like? How does it taste? Savor all the tastes of the food or drink.

What can you feel? What is the temperature like? Think of how the air feels on your skin, and how your clothes feel on your body. Soak in all these sensations.

What scents are present? Are they strong or faint? What does the air smell like? Take some time to appreciate the scents.

Resources

Online Mental Health

- Anxiety Canada https://www.anxietycanada.com/
- Kelty's Key https://www.keltyskey.com/
- Option B https://optionb.org/
- Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers https://lawyersconcernedforlawyers.ca/

Mindfulness

- Mindshift (Anxiety Canada) https://www.anxietycanada.com/resources/mindshift-cbt/
- Headspace https://www.headspace.com/
- Calm https://www.calm.com/