

# Florida Lawyers Assistance, Inc.

Florida Lawyers Assistance, Inc. (FLA) offers help to judges, attorneys, and law students troubled by alcohol and drug abuse problems, compulsive gambling, stress, depression, other types of addictive disorders, and similar conditions which may impair these individuals' ability to practice in a competent and professional manner. FLA was created in 1986 by recovering attorneys and addiction professionals in order to help other lawyers deal with their impairments. The staff and volunteers of FLA know the problems faced by impaired attorneys and how to help overcome these problems.

Because of the sensitive nature of addiction and psychological problems, attorneys who may be in need of help are often very reluctant to seek that assistance. Recognizing this concern and in order to foster early and confidential contact with FLA, the Supreme Court of Florida by Rule 2-9.11 authorized creation of a program to assist members of The Florida Bar with substance abuse or psychological problems, and approved Rule 3-7.1(o) which states that any treatment provided to an impaired attorney shall be deemed confidential and may not be admitted as evidence in any disciplinary proceeding.

The backbone of FLA is a network of over 300 attorneys throughout the State of Florida who are themselves recovering from drug and alcohol addiction, psychological problems, and impairment caused by other conditions. These volunteers stand ready to assist their peers in all areas of their recovery.

**FLA Attorney Hotline:**

**(800) 282-8981**

**FLA Judges' Hotline:**

**(888) 972-4040**

## FLA Can Help

Among the services which FLA can offer to an impaired attorney, judge, law student, or support person are:

- **Assessment and Referral:** A trained member of the FLA staff will meet with the affected attorney, either at FLA's Ft. Lauderdale office or off-site, to evaluate the problem and recommend available treatment and rehabilitation options.
- **Interventions:** In appropriate situations, a member of the FLA staff will plan, rehearse, and facilitate a formal intervention to assist an impaired attorney.
- **Peer Support Network:** The affected attorney will be paired with a recovering lawyer in their area to act as their mentor and to help them deal with their rehabilitation.
- **Attorney Support Meetings:** FLA sponsors weekly meetings around the state where attorneys help each other deal with the problems and stresses of practicing law while maintaining their recovery from substance abuse or psychological impairments.
- **Education and Prevention:** FLA works with law firms, the courts, and Florida Bar committees to educate members of those entities concerning attorney impairment and recovery. In addition, FLA makes regular presentations at the law schools throughout the state regarding impairments and how they may relate to the admissions process.
- **Annual Workshop:** FLA presents a seminar each year dealing with quality of life issues, recent developments in the treatment of various impairments, disciplinary proceedings in which lawyer impairment was involved, and Board of Bar Examiner decisions and procedures concerning admission of applicants with histories of chemical dependency or psychological problems.

➤ **Structured Rehabilitation Program:** In cases involving attorney discipline or admissions problems, FLA will implement a structured rehabilitation program which can document an attorney's or law student's recovery. Such evidence of recovery will often be taken into consideration by The Florida Bar or Board of Bar Examiners when determining discipline or recommendations for admission.

## Facts About Impairment

Chemical dependency and depression are treatable illnesses. However, failure to obtain treatment can lead to dramatic personality changes and deterioration of ethical values, leading to criminal and disciplinary penalties.

Chemical dependency and depression occur in every socioeconomic group. It has been estimated that their prevalence within certain professions (including attorneys) may be significantly higher than in the general population.

Alcohol is by far the most widely used and destructive drug in America.

Marijuana is not a "benign" drug. It severely affects memory, concentration, and ambition.

Complications associated with the use of cocaine include damage to the heart, brain, and other major organs.

More than 400,000 Floridians suffer from a compulsive gambling disorder.

One of the symptoms of chemical dependency is denial - an individual who is addicted usually has little or no insight into their problem.

50% to 80% of all attorney disciplinary complaints are related to an impairment issue.

Early intervention and treatment of the affected attorney often leads to sustained recovery.

Tremendous advances have been made in the treatment of psychological disorders.

## Ask Yourself These Questions:

(Respond with YES or NO and answer as honestly as you possibly can)

1. Are your associates, clients, family, or office staff alleging that your work is being affected by your addictive behavior (alcohol, drugs, gambling) or your moods?
2. Do you plan your office routine or appointments around addictive behaviors?
3. Do you ever feel that you just can't face certain situations or that you need a drink or drug to do so?
4. Do you drink or use drugs alone, or isolate and avoid contact with others?
5. Have you ever had a loss of memory while using alcohol or drugs, although apparently functioning (e.g., a blackout)?
6. Do you ever use alcohol or drugs before a meeting, deposition, or court appearance to calm your nerves, gain courage, or improve your performance?
7. Do you find yourself wanting or taking a drink or drug in the morning, or find it increasingly difficult to function despite getting adequate rest?
8. Have you missed or adjourned a closing, court appearance, or other appointment because of drinking, drug use, or gambling, or just because you felt overwhelmed or unable to function?
9. Have you ever felt any of the following because of your drinking, drug use, or gambling: fear, remorse, guilt, loneliness, depression, anxiety, anger, or a sense of impending doom?
10. Is your addictive behavior or your mental state making you careless of your professional responsibilities, your family's welfare, or other personal obligations?
11. Does your drinking, drug use, or gambling lead you to places or people you would not normally associate with, or have you or others recognized that your behavior is sometimes unusual or erratic?

12. Are you becoming increasingly reluctant to face your clients or colleagues in order to hide the effects of your drinking or drug use or your emotional state?
13. Do you lie to cover up the amount of alcohol or drugs you are actually using, about the size of bets you are placing, or about the way you really feel?
14. Have you ever taken funds from your trust account to support your addictive behavior?
15. Have you ever been hospitalized or treated directly or indirectly as a result of your drinking or drug use, gambling, or psychological problems?
16. In general, do you find it increasingly difficult to function in a legal setting, or do you find that your attention to work is declining?

If you answered YES to one or more of the above questions, you owe it to yourself, your family, your profession, and your clients to contact Florida Lawyers Assistance.

### A Treatable Illness

**C**hemical dependency and mental illness are not moral issues, but rather are treatable diseases which cause a deterioration of moral and ethical values. Seeking treatment is perfectly acceptable social behavior. These are progressive diseases which never get better on their own.

Free, confidential help is available to you or a lawyer you know who may be dealing with an impairment issue which is affecting the ability to practice law or live life. If you or someone you care about are suffering from such a problem, professional and peer assistance is available to help bring about a positive change.

**FLORIDA LAWYERS ASSISTANCE CAN HELP.  
PLEASE MAKE THE CALL - (800) 282-8981**

Florida Lawyers Assistance, Inc.

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[www.fla-lap.org](http://www.fla-lap.org)