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

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Lawyers Concerned For Lawyers of Pennsylvania

Lawyers Concerned For Lawyers of PA - Our Mission:

"To provide a caring peer assistance program to save the lives and restore the health and professional competence of Pennsylvania's judges and lawyers, members of their families, and law students who may be facing mental health and/or substance use challenges. We carry out this mission through a combination of confidential helpline services, volunteer support and education."

OUR SERVICES ARE FREE, CONFIDENTIAL, NON-JUDGMENTAL AND NON-OBLIGATORY

LCL Helpline

1-888-999-1941

24/7 Confidential Support

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

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24/7 Confidential Support

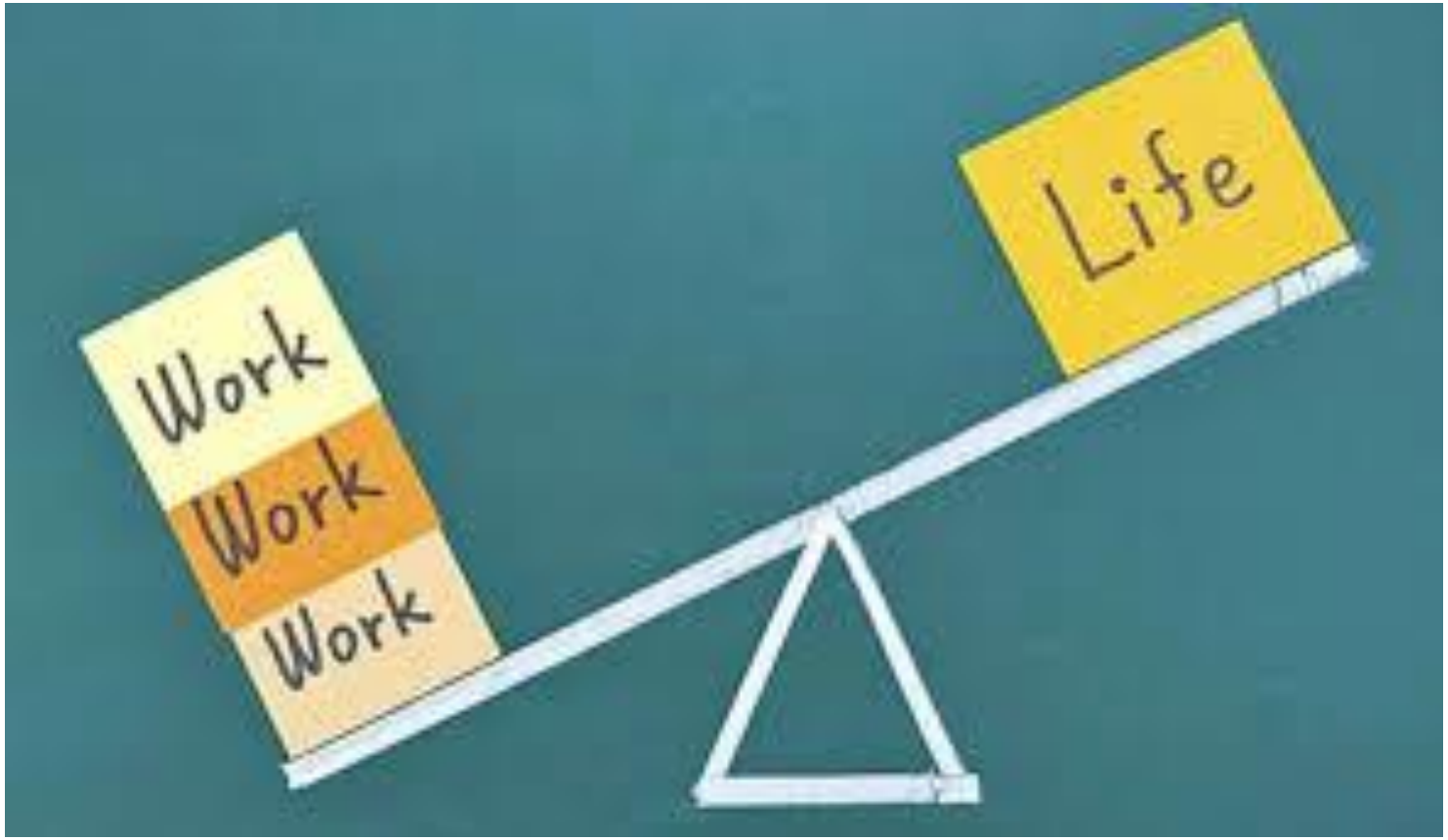
Our services are **free, confidential,non-judgmental** and **non-obligatory**

Anonymity and Protections

- LCL does not report or disclose any identifying information to any Court, Judicial Conduct Board, Disciplinary Board, Board of Law Examiners or any other agency of the Court; nor do we report or disclose any identifying information to State or 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.

GUIDANCE FROM THE COURT

- Rule 8.3(c): This 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.



THE PROBLEMS

Major Problems for Attorneys:

- Stress / Anxiety
- Depression
- Burnout / Secondary Trauma
- Alcohol / Substance Use
- Cognitive Impairment
- Suicide
- Gambling and other process addictions

Lawyers were at an increased risk to develop alcohol, substance use and mental health disorders prior to COVID-19 related issues.

In other words.....

Our personalities
and Our Profession
Put at High Risk

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

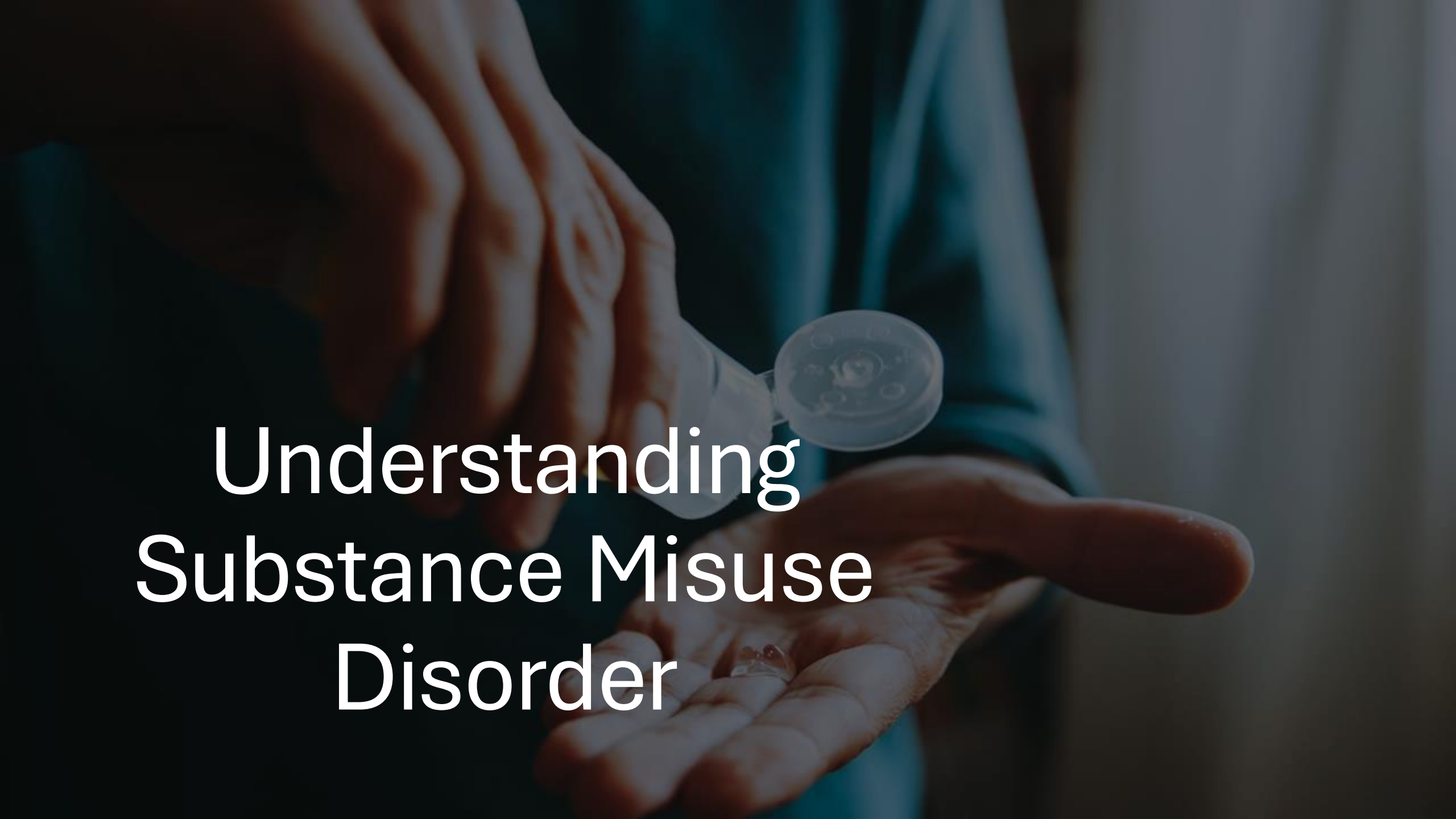
* Problematic drinking defined as hazardous, possible dependence

ABA / Hazelden- Betty Ford Study

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

Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale

- Depression – **28%** *of all attorneys*
- Stress – **23%** *of all attorneys*
- Anxiety – **19%** *of all attorneys*
- Higher rates among younger lawyers



Understanding Substance Misuse Disorder

Substance Misuse Disorder

Inability to Control Use

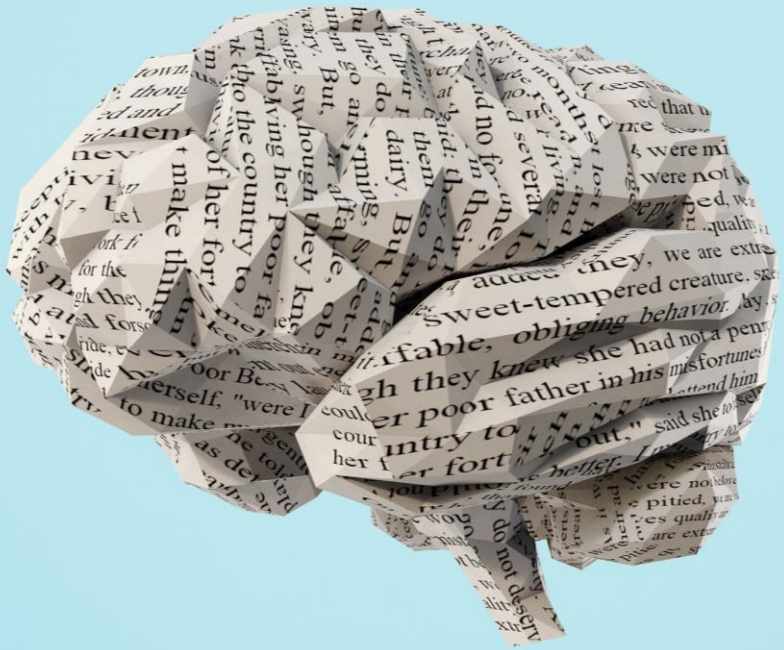
Individuals with substance misuse disorder struggle with controlling their consumption of both legal and illegal substances.

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.



What Is Substance Misuse Disorder

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

Common warning Signs of Substance misuse

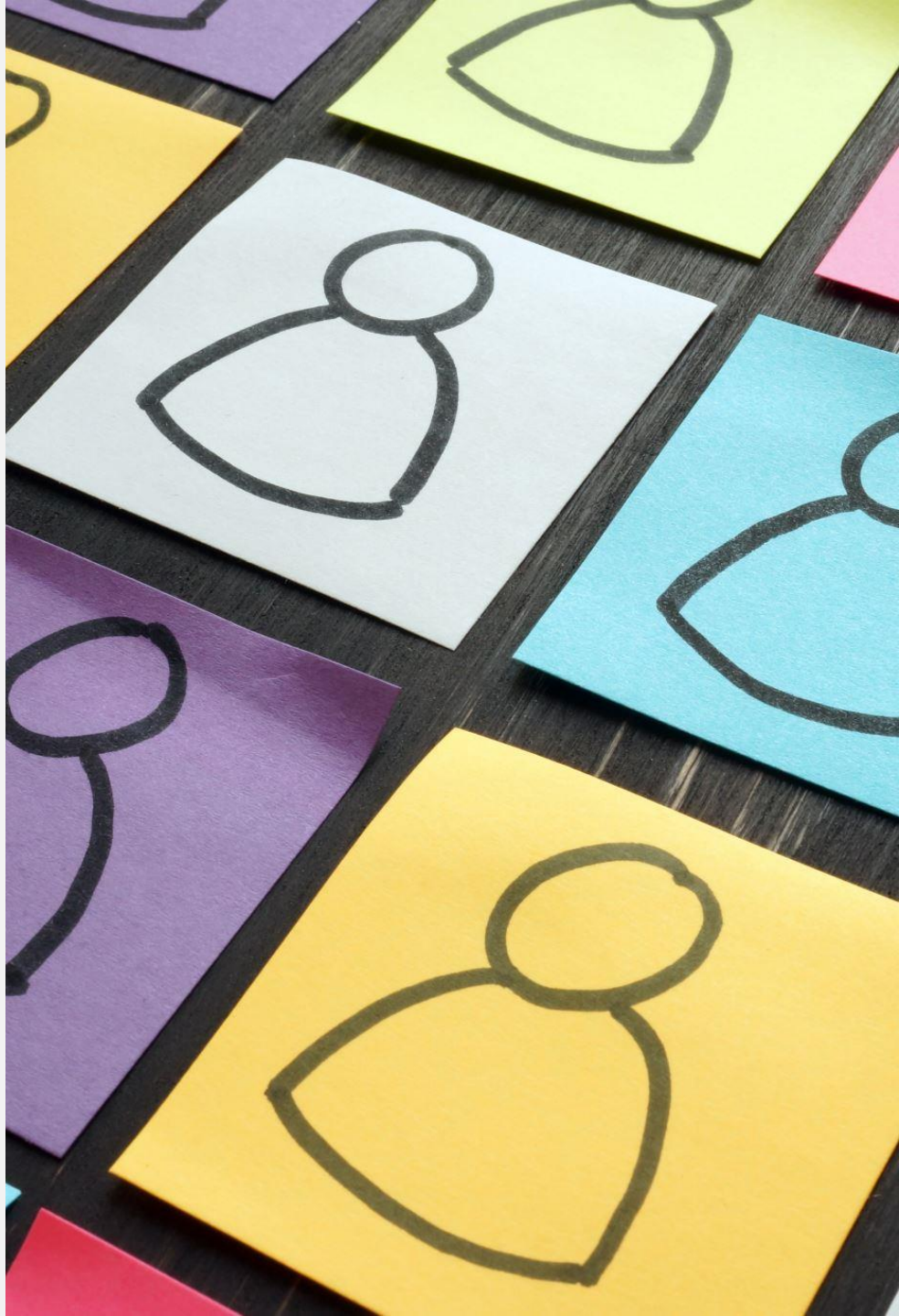
- It's important to recognize that substance misuse disorder can manifest in various ways, and these warning signs can vary from person to person.

Common Warning Signs of Substance misuse

Social Withdrawal:

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

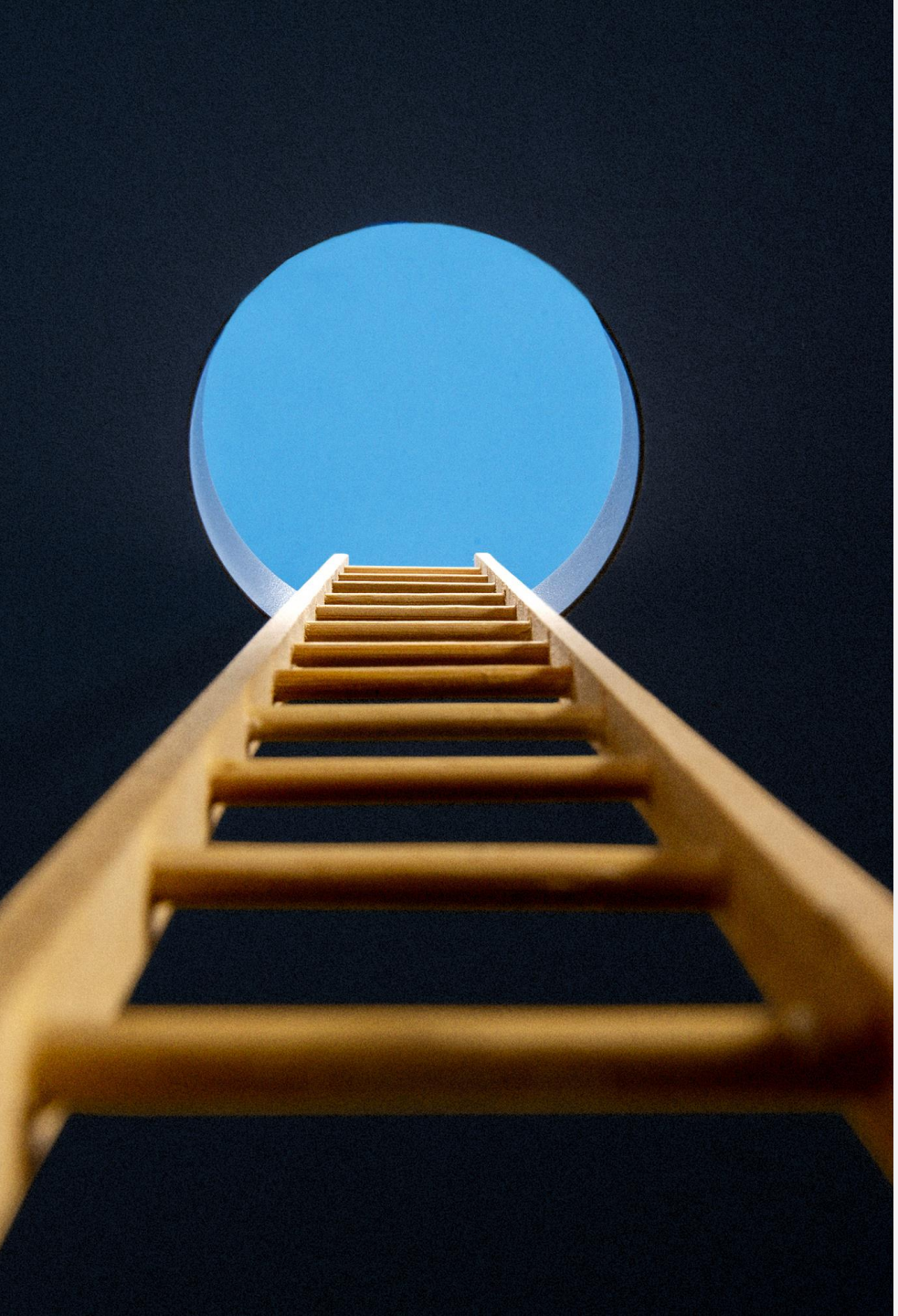
Neglect of Responsibilities



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 /lying about substance use.

Financial Problems:

- Unexplained need for money
- Borrowing or stealing money

Common warning Signs of Substance misuse

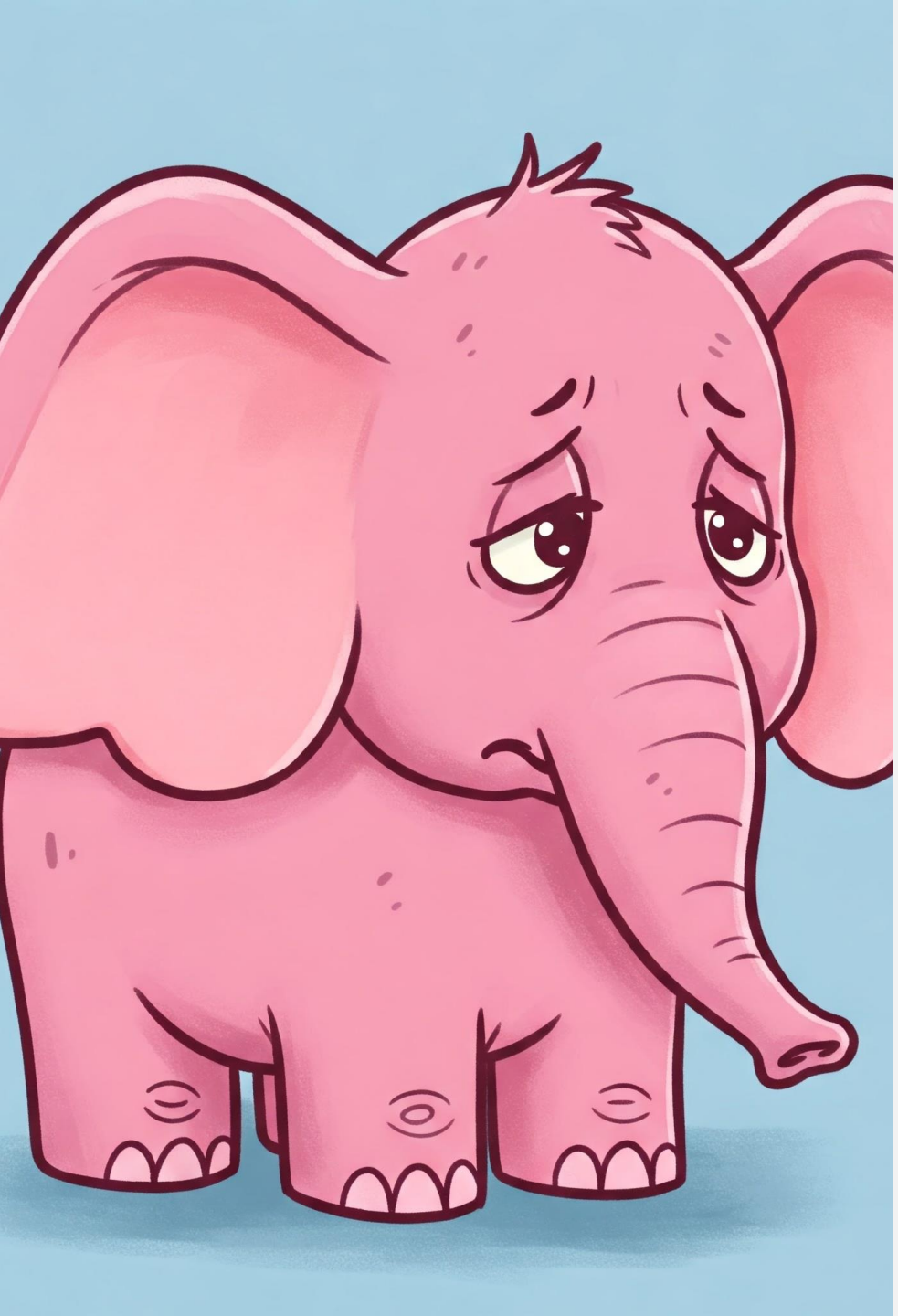
Mood Swings:

- 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:

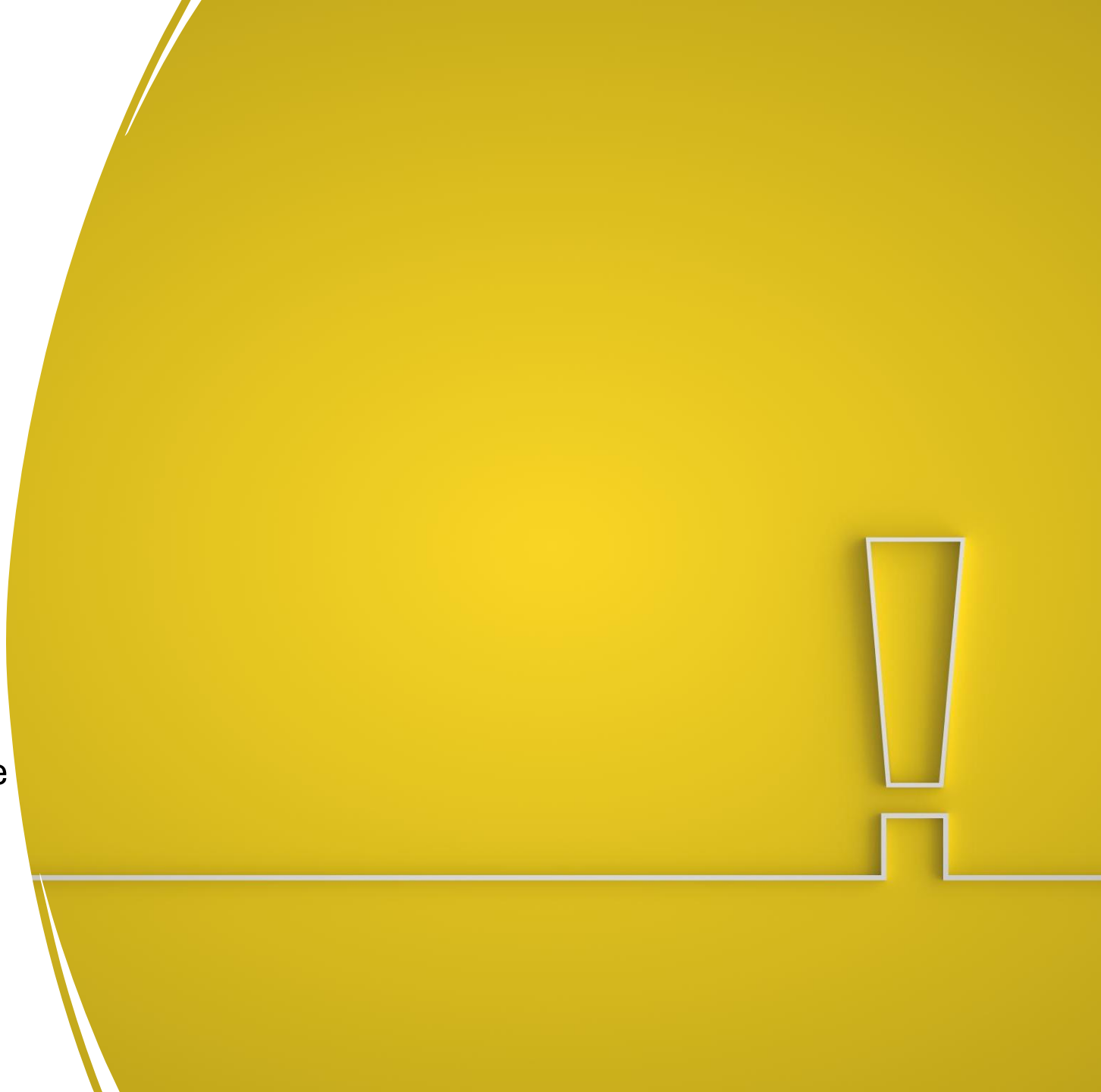
- Difficulty concentrating
- Memory problems
- Confusion

Physical HealthProblems:

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



Unique Stressors Faced by Legal Professionals

High-Pressure Environments

Long Working Hours

Substance Misuse Risk

- 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.

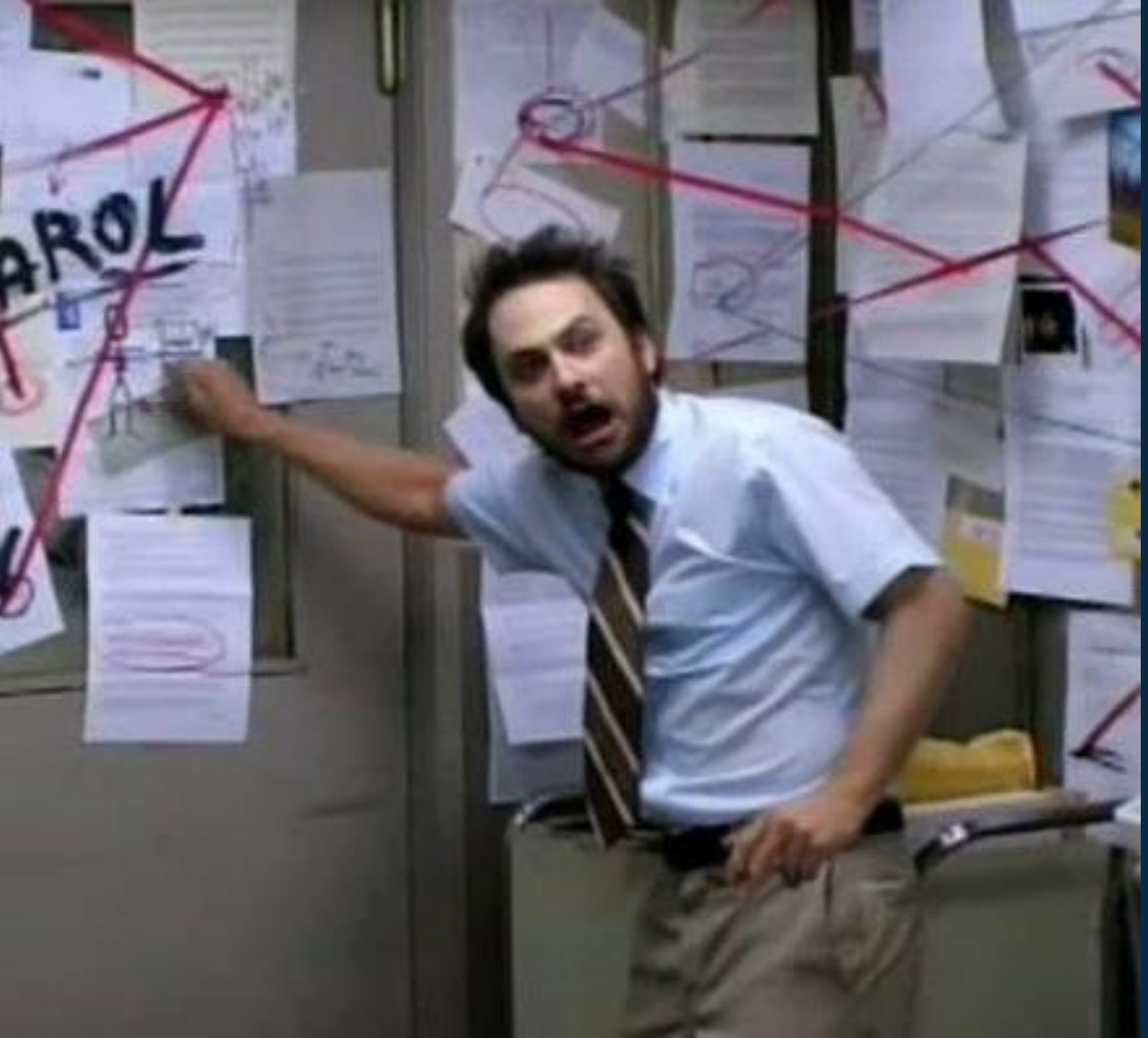
Mood Changes

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.

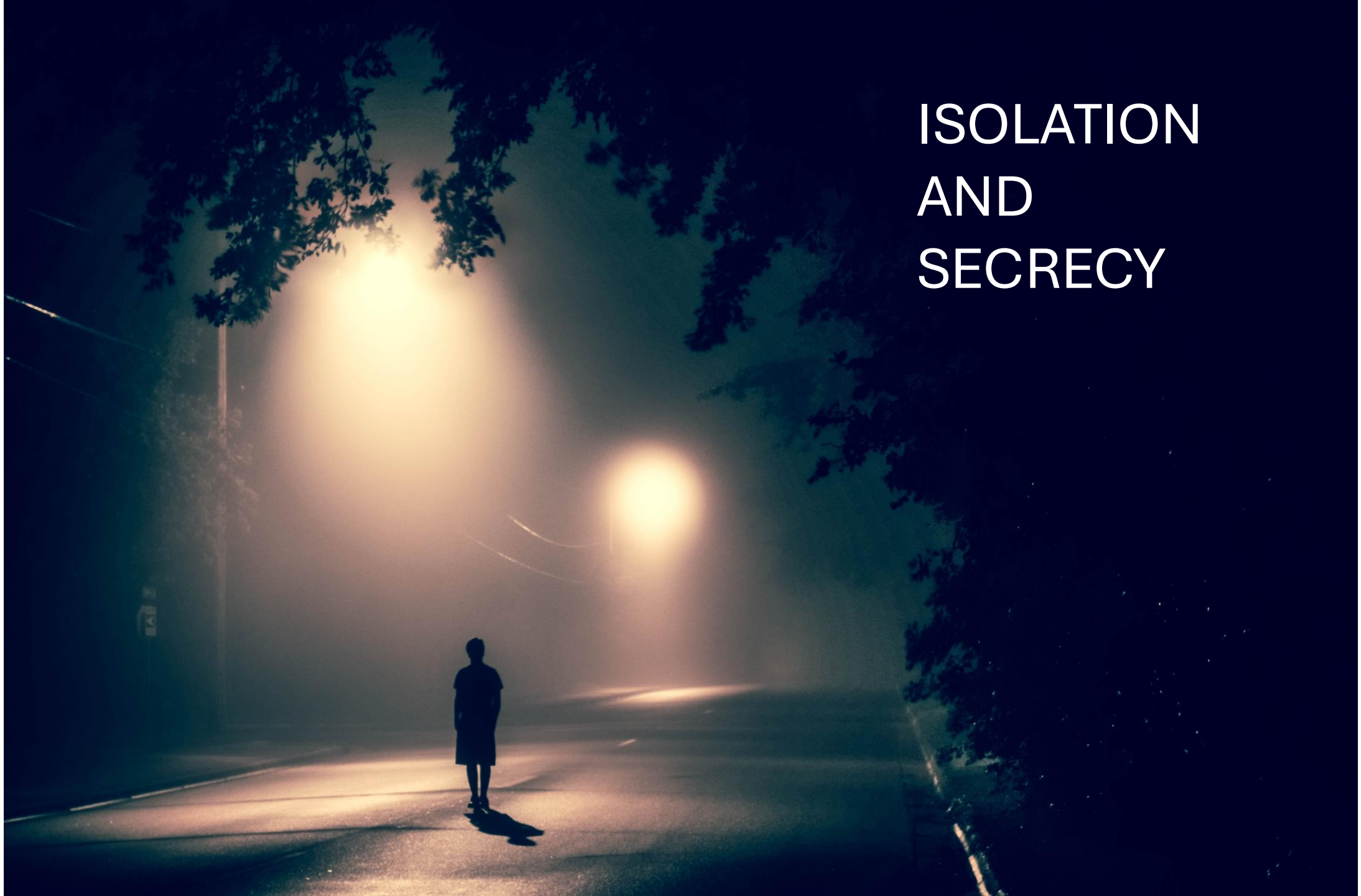
MAINTAINING APPEARANCES



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 TOLERANCE 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.

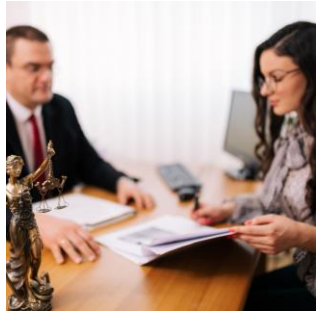
Need for Targeted Treatments

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.

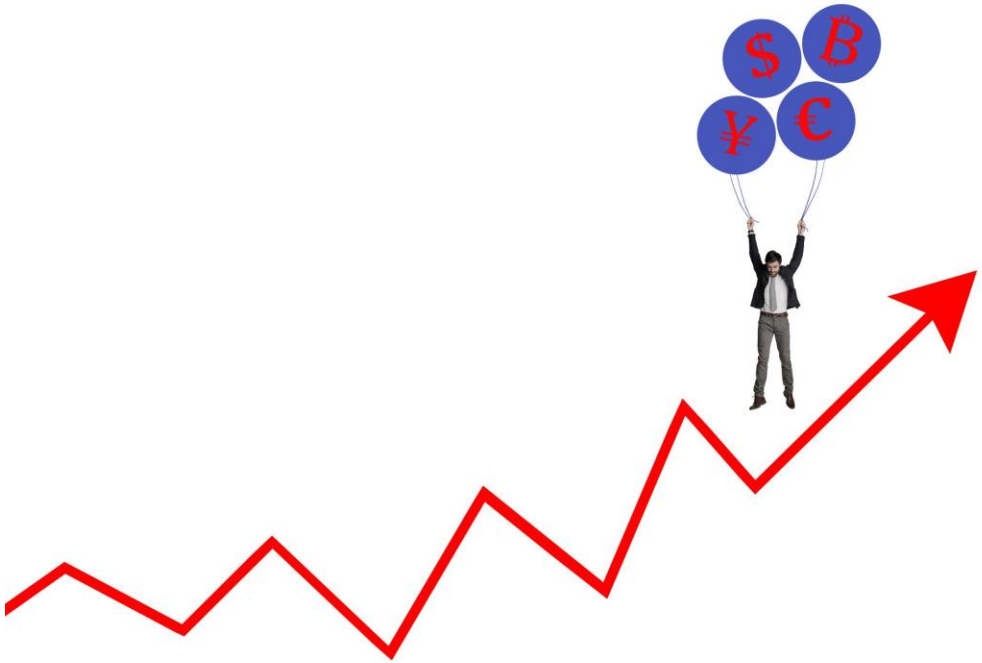
Relationship Strain

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.

Progression From Occasional Use to Dependency



Shift to Frequent Use

As addiction develops, individuals may begin using substances more frequently, indicating a significant change in behavior.

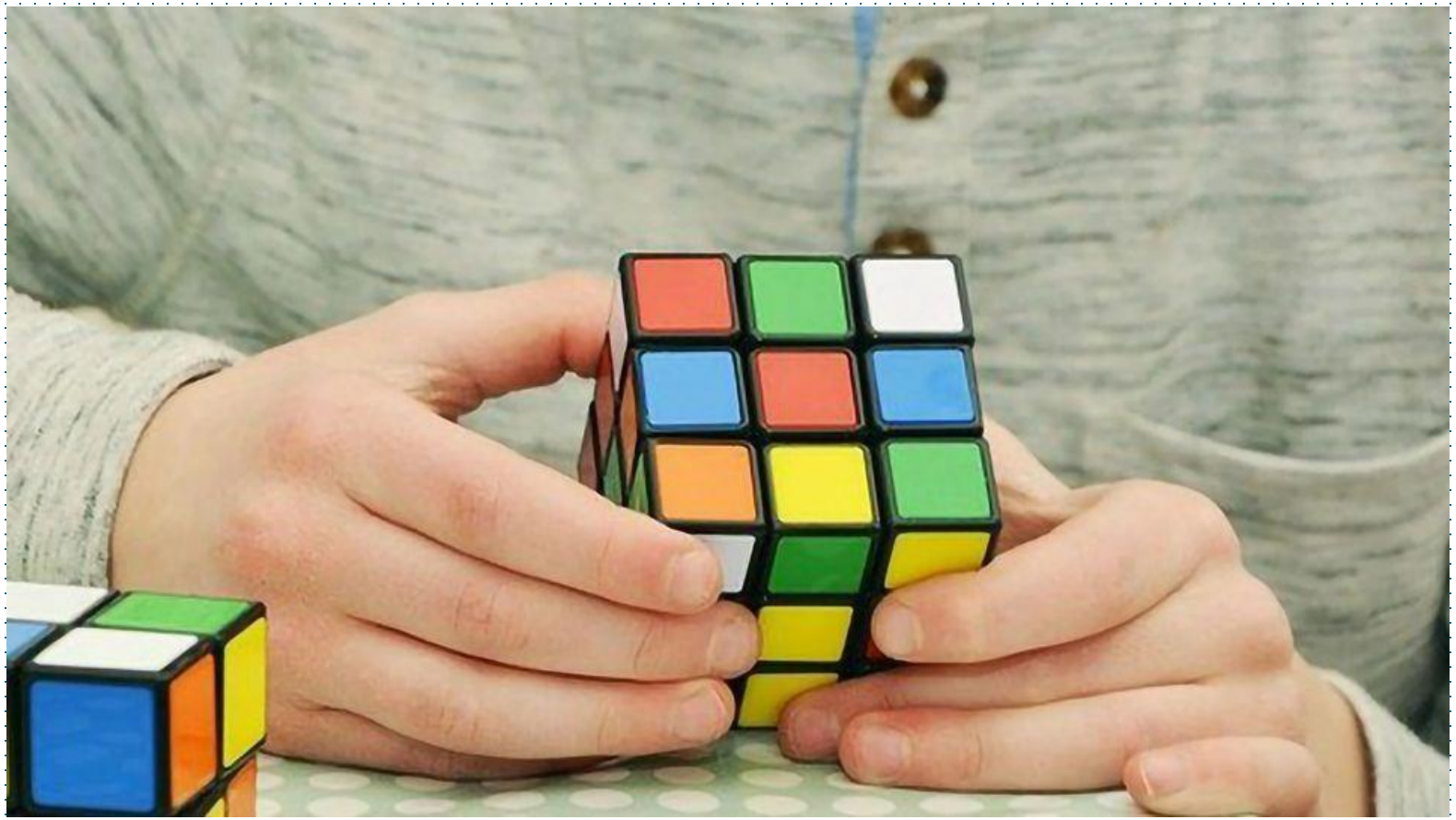
Growing Tolerance

Individuals may build a tolerance to substances, requiring larger amounts to achieve the same effects, further deepening dependency.

Consequences on Life

Dependency can lead to significant negative impacts on personal relationships and professional responsibilities, affecting overall quality of life.

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.

SPECIFIC RECOMENNDATIONS FOR HIGH FUNCTIONING PROFESSIONALS

- Treatment with other peers
- Discussion and problem-solving around professional issues (e.g., how to return to work, how to disclose to HR/colleagues)
- Ongoing monitoring to prevent relapse
- Self-help programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous or equivalent programs

Available Treatment Options

Counseling Services

Counseling services provide individuals with professional support and guidance to address substance misuse issues effectively.

Rehabilitation Programs

Rehabilitation programs offer structured environments for recovery, helping individuals overcome substance misuse through comprehensive treatment plans.

Support Groups

Support groups provide a platform for individuals to share experiences and support each other in their recovery journeys.

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.

How Can I Find Help Through LCL?

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/

Conclusion

Recognize the Signs

Empathy and Understanding

Peer Support!!!!

WHO CAN HELP ME?

Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers

Pennsylvania