

## BALANCING THE SCALES: MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGIES TO THRIVE IN 2026

By *Jamie Rosen, Esq.*



For many of us, January brings a unique mix of pressure and opportunity. Resolutions are made, goals are set, and clients expect immediate results after the holiday lull. While this fresh start can be energizing, it often comes with heightened stress that, if unmanaged, can impact productivity, decision-making, and overall well-being.

Stress is inevitable, but it is also manageable. From the perspective of a mental health lawyer, here are practical strategies to help you start 2026 with clarity and confidence.

### Manage Stress Before It Manages You

Stress is a normal response to life's demands, but when it begins to interfere with your ability to function, it can evolve into anxiety or depression. Stress can manifest itself physically — headaches, digestive issues, fatigue — or emotionally, through irritability or difficulty concentrating. Anxiety is persistent worry that lingers even without a clear stressor, while depression involves prolonged sadness, hopelessness, and loss of energy.

Recognizing these signs early is critical. If you notice persistent changes in your mood, sleep, or ability to focus, take proactive steps before these feelings escalate.

### Reset Your Approach to Resolutions

New Year's resolutions can be motivating, but they often become stress traps. Instead of setting sweeping goals, break them down into smaller, specific, achievable objectives. Celebrate your small wins along the way — acknowledging progress reinforces confidence and reduces pressure. Sometimes, once we achieve a goal, whether personal or professional, we immediately begin to think about the next goal, or how to improve even more. Instead, take a deep breath, acknowledge your success and enjoy the moment.

It is also important to remember that resolutions are optional. You don't owe anyone a grand plan for reinvention. Focus on what aligns with your values as well as your personal and professional priorities.

### Build Resilience Through Healthy Habits

Managing stress isn't about eliminating it — it's about learning and implementing healthy practices and coping mechanisms. Try these techniques:

- **Mindfulness:** Pause during your day to breathe deeply, take a short walk, or simply notice your surroundings. These small resets can prevent stress from snowballing.

- **Sleep Hygiene:** Treat your bedroom as a sanctuary. Avoid screens before bed, journal to clear your mind, and aim for consistent sleep patterns.
- **Limit Social Media:** Constant comparison and information overload amplify anxiety. Set boundaries to protect your mental space.

### Stay Connected Year-Round

Isolation often intensifies during the holidays, but maintaining relationships throughout the year makes it easier to offer and receive support when it matters most. A quick text, call, or coffee invite can go a long way in sustaining meaningful connections. Engage with members of your local bar association (perhaps the Women's Bar) and take advantage of the programs and social events offered.

### Resources for Support

If stress feels persistent and overwhelming, impairing your ability to function, reach out to a trusted colleague, friend, or a mental health professional. Seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

If you or someone you know needs help, confidential options are available through local and state bar associations (*i.e.*, Lawyer Assistance Programs), NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness), or the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

Stress is part of the legal profession, but it doesn't have to define your year. Set realistic goals and prioritize your well-being to ensure a successful year.

*Jamie Rosen is a Partner and Chair of the Mental Health Law Group at Meister Seelig & Fein PLLC, dedicated to representing individuals and families in crisis situations specific to mental health issues and/or alcohol/substance use disorders. Jamie's knowledge extends to inpatient hospitalization matters, discharge planning, confidentiality and HIPAA, applications for Assisted Outpatient Treatment (Kendra's Law), adult guardianship proceedings, Mental Hygiene Warrant proceedings, Family Court Order of Protection matters, housing rights, criminal defense, estate planning, and so much more.*

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