



- Lee Burgess: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we're talking about ways parents can support their law students. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan and Lee Burgess, that's me. We are here to demystify the law school and early legal career experience, so you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be. We're the co-creators of the [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam Toolbox](#), and the career-related website [CareerDicta](#). Alison also runs [The Girl's Guide to Law School](#). If you enjoy the show, please leave a review or rating on your favorite listening app. And if you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can reach us via the [contact form](#) on [LawSchoolToolBox.com](#), and we'd love to hear from you. And with that, let's get started.
- Alison Monahan: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we're talking about some ways that parents can support their law students. And we hear from parents, many of them lawyers themselves, pretty frequently, and they're asking how to support their kids who are in law school. So, we decided to go through some things that we suggest and don't suggest if this is a scenario that you're in.
- Lee Burgess: Yes. So, I think the first thing that parents really need to remember is that this is your child's journey and not your own.
- Alison Monahan: It's true.
- Lee Burgess: It is their law school experience. Even if you always wanted to be a lawyer, or even if you are a lawyer, it's still their experience. And if they're not on board with any intervention or any help, it's really unlikely to be very effective.
- Alison Monahan: Yep, that is definitely true. We see this sometimes with parents who sign their kids up for tutoring and they're really excited about it, and it's going to be so great for the children, and then the kids don't really want to do it. In that case, it's kind of just a waste of money, because if your child doesn't actually want to do this, there's really no point.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think also we find over and over again that oftentimes we speak to the student, or someone's child, and they don't actually really want to be in law school. And so, their struggles don't come from a lack of ability or struggling to figure out how to be a great law student; they just don't have any inherent motivation to be there.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah.
- Lee Burgess: And law school is a hard and expensive thing to get through, and if you don't want to be there, maybe you shouldn't be there. As a parent, I wouldn't want my kid to be there just to be there. I would want them to be there because they



want to practice law. And I think students' performance in law school often correlates with their desire to be there – if they don't want to be there, they're not going to perform very well.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I think this is a hard thing, because children don't want to disappoint their parents. And sometimes parents think they know what's best for their kids, and maybe you do, but if it's going to be three years of kicking and screaming and dragging your child through to graduation – I don't know, that just seems like a lot.

Lee Burgess: Well, and I think that we often see this in the bar work that we do too, that someone didn't really want to be a lawyer and then doesn't really want to study for the bar.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Lee Burgess: And then if you don't get your law license, what's the point?

Alison Monahan: We've even seen people almost essentially fail the bar on purpose, I would say... Maybe not entirely on purpose, but there are some people occasionally where you talk to them and think they're going to be upset that they failed and they're actually happy. And it's always a weird moment, where you're like, "Huh. Okay, so what else is going on here?"

Lee Burgess: Yeah. When I have a student either in the law school space or the bar exam space, where I can feel like there's some sort of hesitation going on, I often ask, "Why do you want to do this? Why do you want to be a lawyer? Why do you want to study for the bar and be licensed?" And sometimes people will really be honest and say, "I'm not sure that I do."

Alison Monahan: Right, yeah. And it's kind of sad when someone's parents have kind of pushed them into this and spent a ton of time and money and energy, and in the end it's just a lot of time, money, and energy that was spent and didn't really actually pay off with very much. And they probably going to have to find a different career path anyway. So, maybe just cut that short if your kid doesn't actually want to do this.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think there are plenty of ways that parents can be very helpful though.

Alison Monahan: Yes, definitely. Assuming that your child actually wants this.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. Your child wants this, and maybe they're struggling and you want to support them. I think there are plenty of ways that you can support. And I think that especially if you're not a lawyer and cannot necessarily give advice on performing in law school, you can do a lot of things to make the rest of their life



easier. Maybe you could help with food – either give them a gift certificate for a food delivery, or maybe if you're close by, you can cook food and fill their freezer. But any way to keep your law student eating healthy so they don't hopefully get sick, especially during final exams can be a really a big deal. And you end up eating a lot of pizza in law school, and so anything you can do to not eat pizza all the time is just great.

Alison Monahan: And I think the key here is just ask your child directly what would be helpful and maybe give them some suggestions, like, "Hey, I want to make sure that you are able to eat well. What would be most useful? Do you want a gift card for Instacart to make your own stuff, or would you rather have delivery services that can bring you food that's already made? Do you want to join a CSA? I'll pay for any of this. What do you want?" And similarly, things like keeping the house clean. Do you want to pay for a cleaner? Or if you have a pet, taking care of the pet, like pet-sitting if they need to go to the library a lot. All these kinds of things, I think, are areas where parents can actually be really effective.

Lee Burgess: Yes. Even if your child needs help with medical appointments or mental health appointments. I think a parent often can tell when their child is struggling, maybe even before other people can tell. And I think that using your influence to say, "Hey, it sounds like you are really down. Have you considered going to the mental health services at your school?" Or, "Are you taking walks every day or getting out of the house?", or whatever it might be. I think you can often, as a parent, notice some of these things, because you know your child very well and can help them manage some of these challenges as they might come up.

Alison Monahan: Right. You could also pay for a gym membership, for example, or classes, drop-in classes, class pass, things like that. There are a lot of things that don't have anything really direct related to do with school that would just help out a lot. And kind of the logistics of life and just making sure that they can focus on school and classes and not be worrying about, "Do I have enough dog food?" and, "Can I feed myself something?" And hey, cash is always welcome, I will say.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I know, right?

Alison Monahan: I remember being in school and I'd get an envelope from one of my parents or grandparents or something with like 20 bucks in it and I'm like, "Wow, this is great."

Lee Burgess: It's totally true. It's totally true.

Alison Monahan: Doesn't have to be that much.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And depending on what stage of life your law student is in, I think you can tailor what you think would be the most helpful to that. So, if they are living in



school and housing might be one thing, versus maybe your child has their own family, maybe he's working and studying. I think we oftentimes talk to a lot of law students and bar takers who have children, and the grandparents are often a key piece in allowing that law student studier to have the time to study. They often are really pitching in. And so sitting down with your child and saying, "What do you need and how can we be helpful?" – if you can provide that help is really key. Takes a village.

Alison Monahan: It does, and I think just thinking about ways that you can help them free up time and energy is always going to be appreciated.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think that's true. I think it's also important that parents encourage their students to use the resources of the school. I think that sometimes it can be very hard, especially for 1Ls to realize that their school may offer them a lot of support. So, things like career services, they have an academic support office. And some of these resources may not have existed. If you're a lawyer parent, schools are a little different than maybe when you went and got your license. Some of these offices may not have existed, and now they are really kind of key resources for your law student. So, academic support, law librarians, going to their office hours of their professors, talking to teaching assistants, if you have teaching assistants or tutors for your classes, mental health services at school, disability services, the Dean's office. There are a lot of resources, and encouraging your law student to work with the school to try and solve their challenges is really, really helpful.

Alison Monahan: Right, because these people are there in a job, they're being paid, and they know more typically about the school, about the process, about options, frankly, than most parents do. Why would you know these things? You don't know what the process is if your student needs to take a break for a while or something like that. So, I think just drawing on these resources, which I think have gotten better over time, and just helping the student almost brainstorm in some cases, "Okay, well, it sounds like you're struggling in this class. What do you think might help? Do you think going to talk to your professor might help in office hours? Oh, okay. What are some questions you might bring to them?" And it's almost helping them role-play that scenario, which can be intimidating. So, it's not that you have to provide the answers necessarily; it may be that they'd rather talk to a TA and maybe they'd rather do it over email or whatever. But just helping them kind of get a sense of what the options might be, I think can be really helpful.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And I think for parents who pretty much universally want to make their children's lives better, sometimes the struggle point is that you can't move all the obstacles out of the way, because law school is hard for just about everyone, and there's going to be some struggle, it's expected.



- Alison Monahan: Yeah, that's so true.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, and you can't fix it, unfortunately.
- Alison Monahan: Right. And if you could fix it, probably even then it wouldn't be beneficial because your student needs to go through the struggle to actually master the material and set themselves up to pass the bar exam to be a competent lawyer. If you just take it all out of the way, they're not going to learn anything.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. They need to struggle a little bit to find their own footing, to be their own lawyer. You don't really want to hire a lawyer that hasn't had to figure out how to do hard things.
- Alison Monahan: Right, because that's where the confidence comes from of saying, "Okay, I've done this difficult thing, I've been through this difficult experience. I've developed some skills, I feel confident that I can help you with your problem." And without that, they're never going to have the confidence to do the job.
- Lee Burgess: Yes, 100%. I also think it's important for parents to appreciate that law school is graded on a curve. And so, even if your child was used to getting, let's say, all As, they're going to start getting grades that they maybe have never seen before, and this is very normal. And you don't want to kind of minimize this by just saying things like, "You're so smart, I'm sure you're going to get all As." And then they get a C, and then you're like, "Why did you get a C?"
- Alison Monahan: "Does that mean you're not smart?"
- Lee Burgess: "Should you not be in law school?" It's just a different beast than other professional schools and most undergraduate grading.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I think that's just really important to understand, because you might think as a parent, "Of course it's helpful to tell my child how smart they are", but you can go get a great book – and we've done podcasts on this, with [Mindset](#) and [Grit](#) and all of these things – where telling your child, "Oh, you're so smart, I'm sure you're going to get all As in law school." As you said, when they don't get the A it just causes them to think they're not smart. So, rather than something like that, I think it's just important to say, "You know this is a different educational experience. I get that you're probably not going to get all As, no one gets all As, that's not expected. I think you're still a smart and competent person, even if you get grades that you're not thrilled about, because that's just how this process works." No one, literally no one, I think probably graduates from any law school with actual straight As.
- Lee Burgess: It's few and far between. It would be difficult.



Alison Monahan: It would be incredibly rare.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And I also think giving feedback on the process is important too. For example, let's say you are wondering what to say to your child, and you can say things like, "Wow, you have really studied hard and really done your best. I see how hard you've been working." That's the kind of validation that I think is very helpful. "The grades may have fall where they may, but you should be proud of the work that you put in. You really stuck your neck out. I could tell how hard you were working." That's the kind of validation that I think is much more beneficial.

Alison Monahan: Oh, definitely. And just making it clear that no one's expecting them to get the grades that they got to get into law school, because it just doesn't happen. And yeah, I think helping them focus really on things that are under their control, versus the grade: "Did you go into that exam feeling like you had prepared to the best of your ability? If so, then you've done your best, that's all you can do. You can't control how the person sitting beside of you does, and that's what determines the curve. So if you walk into an exam, you do your absolute best and you've prepared – that's all you can do. The grades come down where they come down, and you deal with them at that point."

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It's also important for parents to really appreciate when they need to intervene, when there is a true struggle and figuring out how you can help them. I do appreciate when parents reach out to us about [tutoring](#) because that is a lovely gift for your student, as long as they are bought in that it will be helpful. But finding some outside support to answer your student's questions, to provide resources that you cannot provide is great. We definitely don't want to not encourage people to reach out and purchase help for their law students; it's just that you want to make sure that they're bought into the process.

Alison Monahan: Right. And I think it could be literally substantive tutoring, someone to work with on these skills. But it can also be something a little more amorphous, like life coaching or career coaching, if maybe they're in past that first year and they're in the second or third year and they're saying, "Oh, I don't know what I want to do. I don't know if this is the right fit for me." That is a great time to invest in a little bit of life or career coaching to just help them figure out what is their path. And the same with therapy – schools will offer this, but you can also help them kind of navigate that process or get a private therapist. And not everyone is open to this, but for people who are, I think it can be incredibly helpful.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that there are times when only a parent can really step in and tell their child that they need to reach out for assistance. And so, thinking about doing it in a really kind way, but helping remove barriers so they can get the help that they need, can be a huge gift.



- Alison Monahan: Yeah. It doesn't benefit anyone to just randomly let your child struggle if they don't have to. But I think it's always this balance of how do you intervene in a way that's going to be helpful without being overbearing and pushing them down a path that maybe is not the right path for them.
- Lee Burgess: Yep. I think another thing that parents can really do is be thoughtful what you're asking from your law student kids around the holidays, especially the ones near exam time.
- Alison Monahan: True. So true. Thanksgiving, it's always Thanksgiving that gets you.
- Lee Burgess: Always Thanksgiving, yeah. Or even this year, I feel like a lot of schools are going to have finals that run very close to the Christmas holidays, if you celebrate Christmas. I'm not sure off the top of my head when Hanukkah starts this year, but I think that schedules are going to be tight. Schedules are going to be tight this year. And so, I think you really want to lower your expectations that things will be as they always have been, and just remember that your holiday season, which may not be any more stressful than usual, is going to be very different than your law student's holiday seasons, which are going to be full of final exams.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. And that's hard, because I get that people have a lot invested in this idea that, "Well, it's Thanksgiving, everyone comes to the same table and we all fly from across the country, and we all sit together and we all have this meal, and we've always done it that way." But if your law student is across the country and the weather is bad and they're getting ready for exams, this is tough.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, it's really tough. So just keep an open mind.
- Alison Monahan: Check in early, check in often, make it clear, hopefully, that, "We want you to do what you need to do. We understand this might be different, we're here for you regardless. You can Zoom into the holiday if you need to." But there may be some disappointment on both sides, and I just think that's normal.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think so too. Well, I have some special advice for lawyer parents, because I have two of them.
- Alison Monahan: I was going to ask you about that.
- Lee Burgess: I know.
- Alison Monahan: You went to law school with two lawyer parents. Well, how was that?



- Lee Burgess: I did. Well, first, I think there were benefits to that because, one, I grew up kind of understanding what the law school experience was, and I think they were kind about things like holidays and they did remember what some of those stressors were. And I think I have the benefit as you were interviewing for jobs and kind of understanding what's the norms within the profession, it is a lot easier if you have someone in your house who can demystify some of that for you. So, I think that that is a benefit of having a lawyer parent. I think the tricky thing is that what happened in your day is maybe not exactly what is happening now. And when it comes to advice around exams or how things should be done, the exams don't necessarily look exactly the same as the exams in your day. And so, giving advice that is approachable and maybe able to shift with the changing times is great, but don't say, "This is how we outlined. And this is how we did this. And this is how we did this", when exams are just a little bit different. They might look different, they might be more open book and yours might used to be closed book. You've got to make sure that you're not just assuming that everything is as it was maybe 20 years ago when you went to law school.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, definitely. I think it's that balance, again of, "What information do I have that's really useful that you probably are not aware of, based on my experience?" versus, "What am I just telling you what things were like a million years ago that is totally not relevant?"
- Lee Burgess: Yep, exactly. So, if you're a lawyer parent, just be kind with your law student and just remember that their experience isn't necessarily your experience. And I think that will help you be supportive, but not necessarily lecturing them on your wisdom, assuming their experience is going to be the same.
- Alison Monahan: Right. And I think lawyer parents, it might have been the case that you came into this experience really driven, and this was definitely what you wanted, and maybe you were overcoming some life challenges in your background and you became the successful lawyer, and that's fantastic. But now your child, you have to realize has grown up in a completely different world from that, and they may not have that same level of intrinsic motivation to succeed or do whatever. And so I think it can get kind of tricky.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think it can. Well, my kids are elementary school age, so I am very far away from possibly having one of them want to attend law school. But I know that when parents do get a little bit over-involved or more of the helicopter parents persona that we hear about so much, it does come up from a place of love. And if you're a law student listening to this, you do have to kind of say, "Okay, my parents love me and they want the best for me." But if you're not getting the support that you need from your parents, one of your jobs is to go to them and say, "This is how you can support me." Because I think that sometimes some of this overstepping is just that they're not sure how to be supportive. So, as the person who needs supporting, you can say, "These would be the five



things that would be very helpful." And then try and help channel your parent's energy into something positive.

Alison Monahan: Right, because this is coming from a place, as you said, of love and concern, and it's really just a question of helping them figure out how to help you. And this is almost an ongoing life process as well. Some of this is also about the separation of you becoming a grownup. This is a tricky time of life for a lot of people, and I think helping your parents understand how to support you is really critical here.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, yeah. Oftentimes, this is kind of the big separation, of going to professional school and maybe moving away, and maybe you're not on their health insurance anymore and you're not... The entanglements start to separate a lot faster as you kind of go on to your next thing, so it can be a very different experience for parents as well.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think that there can be that feeling of a loss of control, that they're not going to be able to supervise you as closely. And that's all normal, but it doesn't mean it's easy.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, it's so true. I don't have any problems with control, I'm sure it's going to be easy for me to let my kids go out and make their own mistakes. Hahaha!

Alison Monahan: I know. I was going to say, you're not really that far for them being in college already.

Lee Burgess: I know!

Alison Monahan: Crazy but true.

Lee Burgess: It happens, it happens faster than... Everybody says it happens fast, and then COVID hits and time becomes this huge, huge time warp and now... But speaking of one thing that's different, I think one thing that is different is a lot of your law students are taking classes online, or having part of their legal career online, and that's going to be something else that you have to be aware of, that there are going to be new challenges with that. Thank you, COVID.

Alison Monahan: Right. Well, I guess the other side of that, which is positive, is that some of these resources that were not previously available online may be available online.

Lee Burgess: True.

Alison Monahan: So that might make them more accessible. Sometimes I think parents can help, again, with sort of brainstorming ideas like, "I can't talk to anyone at the school because their mental health people are full. Okay, well, I've heard that there's



this app we can try. Have you thought about that?" Those kinds of things can be helpful.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. One other thing we didn't talk about that I would say is, if you know that your law student needs to get accommodations and they are struggling getting all of their materials together, I think especially if evaluations happened when the parent was more involved, maybe the parent was even getting copies of those records, I think it is helpful to try and make sure that the student has everything that they need to get through that process, because that is kind of critical and very paperwork-heavy and sometimes a little emotional to do. And I think that's another thing that parents can be helpful with, especially if you hold some of that documentation.

Alison Monahan: Right. And then sometimes the accommodations are around things like executive functioning, which makes it difficult to get them.

Lee Burgess: To get the accommodations, yeah, I know. Oh, and more thing. This is something my mom did for me, which was super helpful – tell your parents to keep some sort of list of everywhere that you've lived, because it's very helpful when you at some point have to apply for your bar license or get security clearance somewhere. My mom did that because my dad had security clearance and she just knew that it was at some point going to come down the pipeline, and so she kept very careful notes of everywhere that I lived. And now things like Amazon do have that information, but it's also very helpful if your parents provide record-keeping.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that's very true. And I think it's useful too, if you're a parent, you can try to get to know your kid's friends and roommates and the people that are important to them, so if you visit... I remember being in boarding school in high school, and my parents would come and they'd take me and my roommate out to dinner, and we'd get to do a little bit of shopping at the mall and things like that, for our necessities. And stuff like that doesn't seem like a super big deal, but I think it can help a lot in allowing people to feel supported.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think that that's true. I know I was very lucky in undergrad that my roommate's parents lived in town, and on Sunday night, her mom would send... I always had something on Sunday night, so I couldn't go to their house. But she would send me homemade Sunday night dinner, which was this chicken with this apple stuffing. I still dream about this chicken. I should just write to her, I'd be like, "What's the chicken recipe?", because it was so good. But she would make me chicken with stuffing almost every Sunday. It was so sweet.

Alison Monahan: That's so nice.

Lee Burgess: I know, it really was.



- Alison Monahan: Yeah, so I think sometimes it's like the little things more than the big deal.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. Well, I think everybody's got to understand that parents and law students are all going through a big challenging traditional time, and that everybody should be given the benefit of the doubt. But by clear communication, you can give the support that would actually be helpful and maybe receive the support that you actually need.
- Alison Monahan: Definitely.
- Lee Burgess: And that's many years of therapy right there. Boom!
- Alison Monahan: In a nutshell.
- Lee Burgess: Well, any final thoughts before we wrap it up for today?
- Alison Monahan: No. I think my thought, which is always, this is a balance. You want to be supportive without being overbearing. And if everyone can just extend a little grace and hopefully recognize that this is all coming from a positive place, even if it is potentially manifesting in a negative manner, then kind of re-evaluate what's actually helpful.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. Alright, well, with that, we're out of time. If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox podcast, please take a second to leave a review and rating on your favorite listening app. We'd really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. And if you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to myself or Alison at lee@lawschooltoolbox.com or alison@lawschooltoolbox.com. Or you can always contact us via our website [contact form](#) at LawSchoolToolbox.com. Thanks for listening, and we'll talk soon!

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