Episode 59: Conquering Loneliness in Law School

Lee Burgess: Welcome to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we're discussing how to cope with loneliness and isolation in law school. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan and Lee Burgess, that's me. We're 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 Catapult Conference. Alison also runs the Girl's Guide to Law School. If you enjoy the show, please leave a review on iTunes. 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. Today we're talking about something that comes up for a lot of new law or even seasoned law students, which is being lonely or feeling isolated in law school. Now at first you might think this sounds crazy because your law school campus is going to be filled with people, right? But at various points in the law school and bar exam experience, it's definitely normal to feel isolated or lonely.

And these feelings can become problematic when they lead to problems with happiness, productivity, or sometimes you even start going down that road to being clinically depressed. So to start us off, Lee, were there some specific moments in law school that you remember feeling really lonely?

Lee Burgess: Oh, for sure.

Absolutely. In fact, the first one that comes to mind is second semester of my first year, I got the flu and I was super sick, I had this really high fever, I was sitting in class and I started seeing double in my professor. So I turned to my friends and I'm like, I think I need to go to health services.

So I like wander over to health services and I'm like, I'm super sick. And they were like, you have the flu. And I was like, Oh my gosh, you have to give me something. I'm in law school. I can't be sick for very long.

Alison Monahan: Like I can't have the flu.

Lee Burgess: I can't have the flu.

Alison Monahan: I'm in law school.

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Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly. And so they gave me, you know, some cough medicine or whatever.

And so I like have to go to Walgreens now. I'm still like super sick, sitting in Walgreens, like drinking Gatorade and Tylenol or whatever, and then go home. And then I realized that there's no one to take care of me because I lived alone. And I had no food in the house.

Alison Monahan: Oh God.

Lee Burgess: I had like. I just had nothing and I didn't even know what to do and I ended up like ordering soup from the Chinese food place literally across the street for delivery because I just didn't want to even leave my building.

And they're like, don't you live across the street? And I said, yes, please bring it to me. I just really need you to bring it to me.

Alison Monahan: So I just need someone to take care of me even if I'm paying you.

Lee Burgess: Exactly, exactly. And it was, I don't know if it was a law school loneliness moment or an I'm an adult loneliness moment where you realize, you know, that you're on your own and you're taking care of yourself.

But yeah, it was kind of a shocking moment when you realize that you're kind of dealing with this hard thing, but you were really kind of all on your own. And I mean, it was, you know, I was fine. A few days I was back at school, but even just staying home from school for a few days and not really having contact with anyone, You know, feeling like I was getting behind in my studying and things like that, it really did make you feel like you were kind of off on your own and, and it's not a good feeling.

Alison Monahan: No. I had a similar scenario when I was in architecture school, in grad school where I got the stomach flu from like some rotten tomato cafeteria in the school, and I have such a clear memory of being in the grocery store.

And I'm puking like all over the thing. I'm just like, I keep throwing up and I'm like, I've got to make this stop because I have to keep working. So I've like, it was such a clear memory of like being in the pharmacy aisle of the grocery store in Berkeley and like looking for something that'll make you stop throwing up, which of course is like not really, I mean, I think they did sell something.

And so. You know, I bought it and I'm chugging it like in the parking lot and I'm like puking beside of my car.

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Lee Burgess: Oh my god.

Alison Monahan: And it's not working, of course, because like, why would anything like that really work? And I remember like going into the studio and I'm so sick. And yeah, I did have friends at least there.

And this one friend of mine turns to me and she's like, you have to go home. I'm like, I can't go home, like, I've got so much work to do. And she's like, you're gonna throw up on your project. And think about what that's going to look like. You're going to have to start over. And they get, there was that moment of clarity of like, Oh, she's right.

Like I really need to go home, but yeah. The feeling of like wandering the aisles of the grocery store, like so sick and not having anyone that you can rely on or the, I mean, of course, like people probably would help you if you ask them, but, like, you know, you don't wanna bother anyone and you're just like in that place where it's just so horrible and you're like, I can take care of it on my own.

I'm fine.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: And just like-

Lee Burgess: Oh, it's so true.

Alison Monahan: You're not fine, you know?

Lee Burgess: You know. And I also think what happens to law students, you know, I was lucky because I had lawyers in my family that I could talk to or friends who had already been through law school but, you know, I talked to a lot of law students who are the only person in their family that's attended law school that don't have a lot of people who've gone through this experience.

And when things happen or they get rough or stress really gets high, that it can be a really. lonely, kind of frustrating place to be when you don't feel like you have a support network when you're struggling.

Alison Monahan: No, I mean, I didn't have any lawyers really in my family. I mean, my, my, you know, my godfather or something was a partner at a law firm, but you know, my immediate family, there was no one I could call if I'm like, I don't really understand like how to read a case.

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You know, I was basically left to sort find a book and figure it out on my own. Yeah. And it's definitely not a great feeling when you're like, wow, I really just am in this experience and don't know who to talk to or like what to do about this.

Lee Burgess: And I think a lot of people can kind of discredit the feelings of stress and anxiety and intensity of the law school experience if you haven't really lived through it, you know, some people just say, well, it's just school.

Alison Monahan: Like, why are you getting so upset? It's just school.

Lee Burgess: Or you got the flu, just stay home from school for a few days. Who cares?

Alison Monahan: What's the big deal? Just miss class.

Lee Burgess: Right, and you're like, no, you don't understand if I don't do like I can never make up hundreds of pages of reading. Like once, you know, once you go down you can't.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. You're gonna be the bottom of a very deep well at that point.

Lee Burgess: Right, exactly. And so it, it can be very hard when you, when you don't have people you can reach out to that are really understanding your struggles. And you're gonna stumble in law school. I mean, we've talked about this a lot over the episodes of the podcast, and so finding your support network and you know, and being able to reach out to people can be really important. Another thing that I think is tough is a lot of people from a practical perspective, they relocate for law school. And so I mean-

Alison Monahan: That was me.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: I moved from San Francisco to New York to go to law school, and also had a boyfriend at the time for the first semester in California.

And so I think that, you know, on the one hand, that might be a source of support, but it can also be a source of loneliness because you miss the person and then also, as you were just saying, like a lot of times they just don't get it.

Lee Burgess: Mm-Hmm.

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Alison Monahan: You know, so it's like, well, what do you mean you can't talk to me every night for an hour?

And it's like, I don't have time for that.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: You know, like, and so then you know, you're screwing up your preexisting relationships and people are upset about that and you know, it can become pretty quickly like a bad place.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And the other thing I think sometimes people can imagine that you just show up to law school and you, you find these fast friends, I don't know, in the same way that maybe a lot of us felt like in undergrad we did.

But law school is definitely different than undergrad, you're not all living together necessarily, everybody's got their own lives, everybody's different ages and comes with very different experiences. It's, it's not like going back to college. I didn't know.

Alison Monahan: No, I don't think so. I mean, I think it, I think, sure, like hopefully you do meet some people that you connect with, but I think it's definitely different than like, hey, we're like going to show up and have nothing but parties for like the first month and we're going to make all of our new best friends.

Like that's just not really, it's a more serious sort of experience. And, you know, while hopefully there is bonding that goes on, I think it's unrealistic to think that, you know, you're going to be as tight immediately as you might have been with your freshman year friends.

Lee Burgess: I think that's true, and everybody comes from such a varied personal life, too, when you get to law school.

I mean, you'll have people who relocated, you have people with kids, you have people who commute you have, you know, one of my good friends from law school drove 45 minutes to school every day. So she wasn't around campus a lot.

Alison Monahan: I think people just have more complicated lives, typically being a bit older.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: I mean, even five or 10 years, you know, between being 19 and being 29 is a pretty big difference.

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Lee Burgess: Oh, for sure. Yeah. So it can just change the dynamic and sometimes you don't know what experience in law school is going to be that place where you do make friends. I mean, I made some really great friends when I was on the board of the Law Review, people that I didn't really know at all through law school.

But we didn't meet till we were 3Ls.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think the other thing that happened your first year is maybe, you know maybe you meet some people at orientation that you think you're going to be great friends with but then if they're not in your section you almost don't see them.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: So it can be really hard I think to maintain relationships across the sections and things like that because they're just you know these are not the people that you're seeing on a daily basis.

Lee Burgess: Do you think it's harder for introverts to connect with people sometimes in law school too?

Alison Monahan: Well I think in general it's probably harder for introverts to make freinds initially. I mean the good news is I think most people in law school are actually fairly introverted on average so you might find out that you can make friends in a study group and you guys sit quietly in the library and study together and you barely talk to each other, but you feel like you have that connection to someone.

It might actually be easier for an introvert.

Lee Burgess: That's true. That's true. And then I think you have this situation, which you were just talking about with your long distance boyfriend that existing friends and family may be disappointed that you can't give them as much time as they want, you might be feeling pressure from them, maybe they're pulling back from you because they feel like you know, you're not as available for them, it can create a lot of, you know, complicated emotions and feelings by just your relationships that are existing when you start law school that are strained because of the law school experience.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I read an interesting description of what loneliness is the other day, and basically, I forgot who exactly it was that said it, sorry, plagiarizing but basically, the idea was that loneliness has nothing to do about being around people or not

being around people. What it really has to do with is you're not getting the sort of intimacy that you want for some reason.

And so I think that's a really good way of looking at it, where it's like, you know, why am I lonely? I'm surrounded by all these people. Like, I should be happy. I should be making new friends. But, you know, if you're missing someone or like you feel like your relationships are strained or whatever it is, you know, it's normal to feel kind of down or lonely a lot of the time, even though you might be surrounded by all these people that theoretically could be your new best friends.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's a really, that's a really good point. So, it sounds like most law students are going to go through some period when they might feel alone or isolated.

Alison Monahan: Well, I think it's really common.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Anyway, I think, people can struggle with it because oftentimes it feels like maybe you're the only one and everybody else is going out to bar review every Thursday and they're having such a great time, but some of those people are probably self medicating with alcohol.

Lee Burgess: That's also a common thing we see in law school.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think, you know, I think you do act, and I think this is a serious point, I think you do see these sort of maladapted reactions to these feelings that people may not either be experiencing directly or they don't want to be experiencing. So, you know, you see things like people start acting out in other ways, basically.

Lee Burgess: Well, I think that's a good catalyst, though, to talk about what people can do to feel less isolated or alone, hopefully, that don't involve self medicating.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and you know what, we're not saying there's anything wrong with going out and having a beer with your classmates. That's not a problem.

Lee Burgess: No, we're big fans of that.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, you know, like that's a great, you know, I think that's a great way to sort of meet people and if you find, you know, I think, particularly if you're introverted, I

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think it can be difficult to sort of make yourself do these social activities that a lot of law school does revolve around. So, and you know, at my school, they had a bar review every Thursday.

And, you know, sometimes, like, I didn't feel like going to that thing. I was like, God, like, I have to get dressed. Like, I have to, oh, I'm so tired. I just want to stay home and watch TV. But typically, I think, even people who are more introverted find that they actually enjoy being out in the world, at least in limited quantities.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Yeah, that's true.

Alison Monahan: So I think it can be good to kind of make yourself move out of that comfort zone a little bit at least.

Lee Burgess: For sure. For sure. I think that is a really good point. And you know, maybe even look for outings that may be even themed or around something that could be more interesting to you.

Like, if you're really into wine. I'm sure that at some point your law school will have some sort of a wine outing or a wine bar outing or something like that where you could try and even find a subset of people within your law school who maybe even share a non law school interest that you can kind of bond with.

Alison Monahan: Or, you know, like getting involved in some sort of pro bono project in a structured way where I think if you're feeling really isolated, it can be useful to take on some sort of responsibility for other people. So that, you know, it's like, well, I actually can't just stay home and watch like a rerun of eight episodes of Sex and the City, because I have to go to, you know, Family Court and help this woman, or I have to go to, you know, whatever it is, like, do the social security appeal or unemployment appeal.

And I think, you know, A, that gets you out in the world. It gets you interacting with people. It can make you feel, you know, like you're being more useful to the world, which, you know, can help with this sort of, like, isolation and loneliness, and, you know, if you're getting dragged down in that, a lot of the pro bono stuff can be really good because if nothing else, you have to talk to people.

Lee Burgess: No, it's very true. And you know, as much as we all like a good wine bar, doing something good for the world, you know, that's another way to meet people.

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Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. And if nothing else, like you get to feel good about yourself. You're like, you know, I like went down and it's interesting. I mean, you know, it's not going to be boring.

Yeah. Because I think a lot, you know, for sometimes in law school too, like a lot of this sort of like lonely disaffectedness also is just kind of boredom.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: You know, like a lot of the reading like kind of is a drag after a while and you're just like every day is sort of one after the other. And if you can shake it up a little bit, I think that can get people like out of that funk.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that's a really good idea. I also think if you're kind of OD'ing on law, that it can also be really helpful to just look into your community and even look for other volunteer opportunities or you know, do a team and training join some sort of exercise classes, boot camps or, you know, CrossFits or yoga Alison loves taking pottery classes.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And like in law school, I always made sure that I had some, some sort of exercise class through the gym at school. Like it was cheap. It was usually pretty interesting. And again, like, you know, was it like an, I mean, was the best use of my time going to my squash class? Maybe not. But if it's like, you're getting exercise, I became friends with the guy who was teaching the class, you know, things like that.

Like, It's just this low, even a low level of sort of like positive interaction with other people can be really helpful, particularly outside of law school.

Lee Burgess: For sure, and you might find that it actually helps your sanity to remember that there is a world outside of law school and talk to people who aren't in law school.

I think if, especially if you've relocated somewhere and you only hang out with law students, it can be really nice to talk to people from the outside world and get a bit of a reality check.

Alison Monahan: Oh yeah, absolutely. Yeah, and I think, you know, scheduling these things so that you know that every Monday at this time you're going to go to this yoga class or something, that can also help mentally so that when you're kind of like, oh, like, I don't have any friends, I never talk to anyone, I never leave the house, you can

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kind of look at your schedule and be like, well, actually, no, on Monday, I am going to do this.

And then on Wednesday, I do have this other group that I go to or whatever it is.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Just to kind of give you that touch point of like, no, you're actually not totally by yourself in this experience, and, you know, there are other people who are interested in talking to you.

Lee Burgess: And I think you can even use the same kind of strategy with friends and families.

You can set up standing, you know, dates with people, whether it be phone dates with your long distance significant other or weekly dinner out with your best friend who might be in town or, you know, whatever it might be, or, you know, family or you do Sunday night dinner with your family, whatever it might be, I think it can be nice to just build those into your schedule. I mean, one of the things we talk about a lot on the podcast with all of our tutoring students is the importance of, you know, having a, a working study schedule, but they, you know, it might sound crazy to schedule in these times for social activities, but it's not because you need to protect them just like you protect everything else.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and also it gives you something to look forward to. I mean, this is one of the reasons if you read studies about like why it's better to spend money on experiences, it's not just that you have the experience, it's that you get to look forward to the experience and then you get to reminisce about the experience after you have it.

So, you know, maybe you're having a really crap week and it's Thursday, but if you look at your calendar and you're like, oh yeah, right. Like every Saturday I have this group of people who get together and they have a potluck dinner, that's going to make you feel better.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Yeah, it's very true. And I think that just your potluck dinner reminder is a good note that it doesn't have to be like an expensive experience outing.

It can really be, you know, yeah, a Saturday night dinner potluck group or, you know, everybody gets together and someone, you know, they bring different types of wine or they watch you do a movie night if everybody's in independent films or whatever it might be. It's, it's just more important that you set aside

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that time so you can connect with people and do something fun, get out of your own head for a little bit.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that's great. Another idea is, you know, if you have the time, maybe some sort of part time job, especially one that's not necessarily related to law.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: You know, I mean, even something as simple as like babysitting occasionally, you know, you're like, oh, that was kind of fun. Like I get to be a kid again and like, play with people.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I know. It's interesting. Sometimes when I'm at the park with my kid, I'm always like, yeah, this would have been a great like part time job. You can just like go to the park. I mean, you might have to play with kids, but that's, that's fine. Kids are funny.

Alison Monahan: I went to boarding school. I was in high school, I was in boarding school and it was actually really nice to babysit sometimes on like a Friday or Saturday night.

Cause you got to go to someone's actual house and like, you know, hang out with the kids and like make dinner in a real kitchen. And that could be kind of a nice break.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Particularly if you're living in sort of a dorm environment or something like that.

Lee Burgess: For sure. For sure. And I was an SAT tutor.

And I was in law school and that used a completely different part of my brain. But I also liked it. It was like getting out of the law school bubble and it was being helpful. It was in a way what you were talking about with the pro bono stuff. I got to add value, you know, help these high school kids in a way that I didn't feel like I was being helpful in law school because I didn't know what I was doing.

Alison Monahan: Right, I think, I think that's one of the reasons people get sort of beaten down is that there's a lot of uncertainty and the feedback, if you're getting any feedback at all, is often not that positive.

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Like maybe you're getting chastised in class for not knowing the right answer and it could really, you know, it can really shake people's self confidence. And I think finding a way to sort of get out there and feel some level of competence, whether it's mastering a different yoga pose or, you know, beating your personal time at the running club, or whatever, or like helping someone in some way, can be really beneficial.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think if you're also having trouble finding, you know people to interact with on a person to person basis. There are definitely online communities that you can reach out to I mean we do that with some of our Start Law School Right Workshop students, I think a lot of our tutoring students like to have kind of a law school pal, person, that they can ask, you know questions to that's kind of a safe place But using your professors at law school who you might have a connection with to try and talk through some of these issues when they come up, or brainstorm solutions, or just to connect with people I think is really wise.

Alison Monahan: Well, and I think this is a place where a study group can come in handy too. I mean, you and I are not necessarily the biggest fans for study groups for actually studying. I mean, sure, some people they work great for, but you know, you don't have to join a study group. But if you're feeling like you really spend all of your time by yourself, you know, you're studying only in your house, whatever it is, if you feel like it would be helpful just to even have people You don't even have to study together necessarily, like, you know, you could just go and sit in the same room and kind of like commiserate for a few minutes and then get to work.

I think that can be valuable.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think it's also really important to know that all of this stuff gets worse when you are exhausted and you're not taking care of yourself.

Alison Monahan: Right. I mean, once you're, once you're tired and you're emotionally depleted. You know, then it's when the stuff can really start to spiral.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So I, that's always one of the first questions I think you have to ask yourself when you really start to feel like you're getting down in the dumps is, you know, am I taking care of myself first? Because If you're not, you can't be a great law student, you're not gonna be able to connect with other people because you're in kind of a negative place.

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And, you know, they always say, or when I was, I think it was a mommy blog, but was sending around this image of, you know, you have to put on your own oxygen mask first before you can help anybody else.

Alison Monahan: Yeah.

Lee Burgess: I think it's true.

Alison Monahan: And I think people have to, you know, have to think about what works for them.

I mean, if you know that you're super introverted, and it's going to drive you crazy to go out to a bar, like, okay, fine. Don't force yourself to do that every week. But if you know that you're really extroverted and you're bored out of your mind because you're in school with all these introverts in law school, you think about ways to connect on other parts of the campus.

I mean, you know, most of my most extroverted friends didn't really hang out with law students. Like, they had business school friends. And, you know, those people partied. Or a lot of the LLMs. A lot of the LLMs were foreign students and they didn't care about the grades they got, so they went out every single night. So, occasionally, really by my third year, when I was like, alright, I don't really need to spend that much time on class anymore, like those people are fun to hang out with occasionally, so. You know, you kind of, you can think of other places besides, like, just the people who are in your section, which, I mean, frankly, you're going to get really bored with those people probably pretty quickly.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's a good point. I also think it's just important, and we of course say this over and over again on the podcast, but when you really decide that you're super struggling, you need to reach out to professional help and get it.

I mean, if you are really depressed you know, just going to a mixer is probably not going to fix it. It's time to call the therapist. The school will often pay for it or there's a-

Alison Monahan: I mean, I would say, you don't even have to be super depressed. Like just do it before you think you need it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: I mean, if you feel like you don't have anyone to talk to, go use your school's free therapy resources.

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You'll have someone to talk to. And they have to listen to you.

Lee Burgess: Yep, exactly. So I think it's, it's always worth considering and it's, it's just important to, you know, be a little self aware that when things all of a sudden don't seem like they're getting better, it's time to reach out for help.

Alison Monahan: Right, and the thing is, like, you don't have to ideally reach this crisis point, you know.

Everyone gets that law school is really stressful and overwhelming a lot of the time. So if you show up to, like, the student health or the student psychological services or whatever, and you're like, I'm in law school, like, I'm feeling really down about it, I'm feeling a lot of stress, can you help me?

They're not going to be like, oh, that's really unusual. Like, what are you doing here? I've never seen this before.

Lee Burgess: Right. They're like, oh, you're just like the last five people I talked to.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I think, you know, the thing is like, it's, you know, you're signing up for a stressful profession and I think it's just better typically to get some coping skills early on before you end up in that cohort of unhappy lawyers who are, have drinking problems and end up, you know, having a DUI and, and you know, like it's just a bad spiral.

Lee Burgess: That's true. So I mean, if I was a, you know, a 0L or somebody who's just starting law school saying this, I might be starting to wonder if it is just practically impossible to be happy in law school.

Alison Monahan: No, I don't think it's impossible. I think it can be difficult.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: I think there are a lot of factors that align against that. But at the same time, there are plenty of people who are pretty happy in law school. There are plenty of people who find it interesting and like, you know, maybe they struggle sometimes, but they get through it and they find ways to cope with that.

I think it's pretty right. I would say it's rare for anyone to be, I mean, you'd have to be like really off the charts on the happy scale. I think to be happy, like all day, every day in law school.

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Lee Burgess: I think that's true. I think there's a lot of grind to how it's set up. And of course it's high pressure, right?

We've talked about the fact that you have this typically this one exam. It's very competitive. And of course, you know, when you're selecting your law school, keeping in mind environmental factors about how the school's culture is where the school's located, things like that can be really important to help your happiness factor.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think certain, certain schools are known for being like very high pressure places, others are known for being nicer. I think that's a totally legitimate concern. I think, you know, weather issues are often underlooked. Like, if I'm in law school in Miami, I'm probably just going to be inherently better off in terms of like, psychology, than if I'm in law school in Chicago in the winter, you know, not to say, not to say that you don't go to Chicago, but if you're choosing two equally, you know, prestigious places, and one of them happens to be in a place you'd love to live with great weather, like, that's a valid thing to think about.

Lee Burgess: It is. The other thing that I think a lot of people don't think about is campuses where most of the students commute, and especially if you're relocating to a new town where you don't know anybody and it's kind of a commuter campus, it's going to be a lot harder to make friends.

Alison Monahan: Yeah that's a tough scenario. Not to say that you can't do it, but you've got to think in advance, like, how am I going to connect with people inside and outside of law school? And maybe it's afternoon lunch on Thursdays or Fridays or whatever that you set up, but you've got to really think strategically. You can't just kind of show up and be like, oh, everything's gonna be great. I'll somehow meet people.

Lee Burgess: Right. And, you know, and so when you're selecting your law school, I think it is important to keep these things in mind.

And you should ask. Students, you know, when you're a prospective student, how the social life is, but you know, do the law students go to weekly events? You know, are there lots of networking events? Because I think a lot of the students will be pretty honest about what the culture is. Or it might possibly be like, well, a lot of students live, you know, some schools in LA, a lot of students commute in like a half hour to school, because that's just the reality.

Alison Monahan: Oh, there'd be like nothing in LA.

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Lee Burgess: Yeah, and so you're not going to probably have bar nights right next to campus. Or if your school is located in a neighborhood that maybe, you know, isn't conducive to bar nights, then that's not going to happen. You do, you just have to be really aware. And I think be thoughtful and ask these questions because I do think they can really key off happiness.

I know for me you know, staying in San Francisco was a big part of deciding where I wanted to go to law school and that made me happy. So, you know, that was, I like-

Alison Monahan: And for me, like, I'd always wanted to live in New York and I had like a number of good friends who were in New York who I could kind of parachute in and if I really needed somebody to hang out with occasionally, I could go to Brooklyn and hang out with some of my best friends, you know.

That's really different than if I'd gone to school someplace, like, that I didn't know anyone.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And I think for me, one thing I had to always remind myself in law school, and I think it's really easy to lose sight of this, is going to law school is a privilege, and it is something you're doing voluntarily, and it is still years of your life.

And if you are truly, truly miserable, then maybe you need to evaluate if this is going to be a successful path for you. Because-

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely.

Lee Burgess: The law as a practice is different than law school, but it's got a lot of the same characteristics, I think.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I think, you know, it's going to sometimes be difficult for people to sort of honor their own happiness, but I think it's a very valid thing.

You know, there are plenty of people who have left law school and been perfectly successful in life, you know, and they would look back and say, yeah, like, you know, leaving after the first semester was the best decision I ever made because I know this was not something that was going to make me happy.

And that's something to keep paying attention to. And also, you know, just in terms of like jobs and things like what kind of jobs are you interested in and, you know, trying things out and really evaluating, is this working for me?

Lee Burgess: Right.

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Alison Monahan: Is this something that's going to make me happy in the long term that I could see myself doing?

And if the answer is no, then you've really got to think seriously about your career choices, I think.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I mean, we talk about the importance of defining your own success. Law school is also going to pressure you to be defined by their constraints of success, be it a big firm job, or straight A's, or being in the law review.

And those aren't necessarily going to match up with everyone's individual definitions of success, and so it's important, you know, to even go through an exercise and write down your own goals. So when you feel pressure to be defined by other people's definitions of success, you can be like, no, I'm good.

I've got my own. They're in my pocket or my iPhone or whatever.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And you know, some of that I think comes down to even like how you want your relationships with other people to be. Mm-Hmm. , so. You know, say that you're lonely because you would prefer to have a significant other and you don't. Well, that's a good, like, first piece of information to know about yourself that like, okay, I can identify this is one of the reasons I feel lonely is I would like to have a partner.

Well, then it's like, well, how are you going to do that? You have to make time to like, you know, go on dates and like this sort of thing. And that's a completely valid use of time. But you're going to have to really block that out.

Lee Burgess: It's true. And yeah, and make that a priority. And you can actually meet people in law school that are, you know, you have time to do things like internet dates or go to mixers or go to meet friends of friends at dinners or whatever that might be.

You just have to carve out the time to do it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think a lot of the, you know, dealing with the loneliness issue is just really identifying the problem. Like, maybe you're lonely because you live by yourself, and you've never done that before, and it's making you sad. Well, maybe you should find a roommate.

Lee Burgess: Right, get a pet, you know?

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Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. It's like, oh, well, I'm, I'm sad because I never leave the house, and like, all I do is study. Well, maybe this would be a great time for you to, you know, foster a dog that you're going to have to walk. I mean, maybe not make the permanent commitment yet to the dog, but you know, like try it out and then, or borrow your friend's dog to go on a walk or whatever it is.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think that that's a really good point. I mean, it's just important to be creative and think about different ways that you can add, you know, little amounts of happiness to your life, and you know, I think we mentioned this earlier in the podcast, a little bit about the bar exam, we're recording this right before the bar exam starts, and so it's, of course, on my mind, but a lot of people, when they study for the bar, also find it very lonely.

Now, a lot of the prep courses are online so they're just what people are watching videos at home and studying on their own. Maybe they're living by themselves. Maybe they are even you know living away from their friend group even for the bar experience It's very important to make sure that you're doing all these things we've talked about about, you know, making time for friends and family to connect with people you know checking in with other friends Just being deliberate.

Being deliberate and, and recognizing that, you know, you don't have to, you know, sure, you're not going to be as, like, available as you would be if you weren't studying for the bar, but, you know, you don't have to, like, say, bye bye world, I won't, I'll be back in two months.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I just don't think that's great for anyone's psyche, necessarily.

Lee Burgess: And if your psyche is in a really, you know, negative place, you're not going to be as productive at studying and you're probably not going to be as successful on the test as well.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, you have to take care of yourself if you're going to be able to function throughout the whole semester in law school or throughout the several months that you're studying for the bar, if you're just going to be able to, like, literally keep it together without cracking up.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: And that's, that's the clearest recipe for disaster.

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Lee Burgess: Yes.

Alison Monahan: You know, I mean, if you're so lonely and alone that you're, you're spending, like, hours a day crying in your room, like, that's not good for anybody.

Lee Burgess: No, it's not. And then, you know, life is what's happening right now. You know, it's like, you don't want to say, well, I'm just going to decide that I'm just going to be miserable for these three years, because it's just three years of my life.

I mean, three years is a long time. And so a lot of life is happening in those three years.

Alison Monahan: If it's even something as simple as like taking a walk in the afternoon or like taking a bike ride, if you have to like go someplace and you don't feel like taking, you know, your car or your taxi, like even these really little things, like getting outside, getting some fresh air, getting a little bit of exercise, like having something that's sort of fun go on, like they can make a huge difference.

Lee Burgess: Huge, huge, huge difference. And you know, I think another thing that people have to also be careful about, especially because a lot of people listening to this, it's election season, I feel like every time we do talk about the election. But I think that it can be really emotionally exhausting to be very connected right now.

You know, be on Facebook. My Facebook feed, which used to be full of like, you know, babies and vacations.

Alison Monahan: Oh God, I can't even like look at it anymore.

Lee Burgess: I know, I know. I have a lot of friends who've completely like shut down their Facebook accounts because it's so, it's so negative. And and I think that, you know, if you're starting to feel a little disconnected, spending all of your time, it can be very easy to start spending all your time online and then kind of go down the rabbit hole of you know, of, negative things, I don't even know the best say it. Yeah.

Alison Monahan: So you have to, again, like you have to be really deliberate about sort of protecting yourself from, and it's not to say like, oh, you can just basically be like, screw the world, I'm not gonna pay any attention to anything. But there is, you know, there again, like there are studies that show like repeated exposure to negative things in the news is just not good for you.

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Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: And, like, you, you can't do that to yourself if you're already in a place where you're, like, kind of going down this negative spiral. Like, reading about, you know, how the world's falling apart and, like, all these people are being killed everywhere is really not going to be helpful.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Like sometimes-

Alison Monahan: You're gonna be better off, like turn it off, go get an ice cream, take a walk. Like get some perspective.

Lee Burgess: It's true. And it's very, very hard. I mean it's, you know, turning off, even news notifications or Facebook notifications on your phone can be huge.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. It's like why is the, yeah, I mean I get like the New York Times notifications on my iPhone and I'm like, why am I getting this notification about like, a bunch of people were killed in Germany?

Like, yes, this is horrible, but like. I, is this helpful? Is this like-

Lee Burgess: I'm in the middle of my lunch, you know-

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. It's like exactly. You're just like, this is not helpful.

Lee Burgess: No, I mean like, you know, of course like you want to know what's going on in the world, but it has to have a balance and I think I think that it's so easy to get sucked into this cycle where you just feel negative about everything.

And so-

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's not helpful.

Lee Burgess: It's not helpful. I mean, I know there are movements on Facebook now. I saw one that's like everybody's supposed to post songs to Facebook.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I was just thinking it's too bad they don't have like a filter on these app notifications to be like, I would only like good news, please.

Lee Burgess: But then we wouldn't get any New York Times notifications.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. Well, it's a thing like it bleeds it leads, you know? But yeah, I think particularly in law school, particularly in an election season, like you have to be

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really, again, deliberate, judicious about protecting your mental energy for these things.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It can be very taxing.

Alison Monahan: And if you're, you know, if you're feeling really stressed out about the election or whatever, like do something productive, like join a voting rights organization.

I mean, I went, I remember when I was in law school, I think it was the second George W. Bush election. And I went to Ohio on election day and did like voter, you know, protection. And yeah, that was like kind of crazy and stressful a little bit, but it was also like it was really interesting and you're in a community, and you were doing something, like you weren't just sitting home being like, oh my God, oh my God, what's going to happen? Oh my God, oh my God, like you're actually doing something. And I think that's kind of step one for a lot of these problems.

Lee Burgess: I think that's a really, really good thing to think about. And, you know, that goes back to like volunteering for a group or finding your community.

You know, if you're passionate-

Alison Monahan: Join a campaign.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. But if you're passionate about some of these issues, and you feel like you need to be doing something, be selective and then say, well, okay, well, I'm going to go to this, you know, event that's coming up because I can be with my people and feel like I'm contributing and I go back to school.

Alison Monahan: I mean, that's a great way to, no better way to find a community than to join a political campaign.

Lee Burgess: That is very true.

Alison Monahan: It's like you might meet your partner, you're gonna meet some friends, like you're getting mentors, you're doing whatever you believe in, like. If you're feeling lonely right now, go campaign.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's very, very true.

Alison Monahan: They'll be happy to have a law student. I can guarantee you.

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Lee Burgess: That's true. And at least then the people you will meet will likely be, you know, you'll have a lot in common.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. You're going to, you know, you're going to be like minded by definition.

Lee Burgess: Yes. In fact, I have a friend too.

It wasn't a political campaign, but I have friends who met and got married by working next to each other at a food bank volunteering.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Another great option. Yep. Food bank, always good.

Lee Burgess: Always good.

Alison Monahan: You're never going to walk away from volunteering at a food bank feeling like you're a terrible person.

Lee Burgess: That's true.

Alison Monahan: And you'll have some perspective.

Lee Burgess: That's true. That's very, very true. Well, with that, I think 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 iTunes. We'd really appreciate it. And be sure to So you don't miss anything. Episodes are typically released on Mondays. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to Lee or Allison at Lee@LawSchoolToolbox.com or Allison@LawSchoolToolbox.com. or you can always contact us via our website contact form at LawSchoolToolbox.com. Thanks for listening, and we'll talk soon.