Passing the Bar: A Quick Reference Guide For Today’s Law Student

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Trigger Warning: Bar Exam

Aside from being very anxiety producing for everyone, the bar exam can also be triggering for individuals who have experienced any one of a variety of traumas. It is important to spend some time thinking through a process for handling such triggers if you think they may derail your ability to perform on exam days.

People are harmed in bar exam questions. There are accidents, assaults, murders, and acts of sexual assault and intimate partner violence. People's homes are foreclosed upon. People are wrongly convicted. People are discriminated against. People get divorced and lose custody of their children. There are a number of fact patterns that can remind test takers of traumatic events in their lives, and therefore make it difficult to focus on the task at hand.

If you know that you will find yourself interacting with a certain type of fact pattern to be emotionally difficult, have a plan for how you will work through it. You may need to get up and walk to the bathroom, you may need to close your eyes and count to ten, you may need to take a few deep breaths. Your goal should be to move through that section of the exam as quickly as possible, earning as many points as you can, so that you can spend more time elsewhere.

Think about whether there are any types of questions that might be triggering for you, and come up with a strategy so that you know what you will do on exam days. You may want to work with a professional psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker, or other counselor during law school and the bar study period so that you feel ready to handle triggering questions should they arise on exam days. As with all aspects of the bar exam, having a plan is the key to success.

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