

STAYING C.A.L.M. DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

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Over the past few weeks the question many of us have been asking is, “How can we stay healthy during the coronavirus pandemic?” The answer was provided but it requires us to engage in social distancing, close our schools and businesses, and to stay at home. Change and uncertainty is something we all deal with, but when it changes our daily lives suddenly and quite significantly, there is a heightened level of stress and anxiety associated with it. For all of us, this occurred in March when the coronavirus pandemic headed to our country and to our state. As a result, it may have left some of us unprepared to deal with the emotional ramifications of being sequestered in our homes for an undefined period of time. For many, there is also the additional responsibility of helping children navigate this significant change and uncertainty in their own lives. The goal of this article is to provide some resources and guidance that will hopefully begin to answer the question, “How do we ALL stay mentally and emotionally healthy during this coronavirus pandemic?”

According to Dr. Martin Boone, a pediatric and adult neuropsychologist and co-owner of Neuropsychology Group of West Virginia, it is very important for all of us to maintain a consistent daily schedule or routine. Further, he recommends parents keep a consistent schedule with completing schoolwork and with providing regular exercise. Dr. Boone also shared parents should take time to discuss any concerns or worries their children are having, and to make sure your kids know that most people who contract COVID-19 will experience mild symptoms. Dr. Boone suggested, “It may be necessary to remind people that we are doing social distancing to protect those that are more

vulnerable and to ensure that our hospitals have the best chance at helping those who suffer more severe reactions to this virus.” He referenced the apa.org website as a source for parents and others who want to obtain updated and accurate information on how to navigate their concerns about COVID-19.

Dawn Neely, a Licensed Independent Social Worker who works with children and adolescents, echoes Dr. Boone’s recommendations. As she shared, “In times of crisis and uncertainty we can help our children feel safe and secure by providing consistency and routine.” She further suggested, “We will help our children manage their anxiety or distress best by being available to answer questions, by modeling healthy skills for coping with distress or discomfort, and by focusing on what we can do to keep ourselves safe.”

There are also several other resources available addressing anxiety, worry and uncertainty amid the coronavirus pandemic. The information presented in these resources provides suggestions for ways to talk with your children about their worries or concerns and also provides recommendations for your own self-care during difficult times (see list of resources available online at the end of this article).

The recommendations made by our mental health professionals both locally and worldwide provide us with guidance on how we can navigate this challenging time in our lives. We must remember we are all in this together and we will survive this time by supporting one another. We also need to recognize it is possible for us to feel connected and to provide each other with support even if we cannot physically be in the presence of others. We can do this by using the acronym, C.A.L.M., as our navigation system.

C – Compassion

It is so important that we have compassion for one another. As Mahatma Gandhi stated, “Compassion is a muscle that gets stronger with use.” We need to make a commitment each day to strengthen our compassion muscle by demonstrating our understanding of what others are experiencing through kindness, caring and a willingness to help others. Some examples of showing compassion to others include smiling, listening to others, and saying encouraging and kind words. In the words of the Dalai Lama, “If you wish to heal your own sadness and anger, seek to heal the sadness or anger of another. Those others are waiting for you now. They are looking to you for guidance, for help, for courage, for strength, for understanding, and for assurance at this hour. Most of all, they are looking to you for love.”

A – Attitude

Making sure that we maintain a healthy attitude is imperative when dealing with uncertainty. Our attitude reflects what we our thinking and will also be reflected in how we act or behave. This quote by Viktor E. Frankl, (author of Man’s Search for Meaning and a Holocaust survivor) provides us with direction on how to maintain a healthy attitude during the coronavirus pandemic. As he stated, “The one thing you can’t take away from me is the way I choose to respond to what you do to me. The last of one’s freedoms is to choose one’s attitude in any given circumstance.”

Some ways that we can maintain a healthy attitude include:

1. Keeping a journal of our thoughts and feelings

2. Self-monitoring our thoughts and feelings and taking a personal time-out if we need it
3. Practicing self-care
4. Exercising regularly
5. Getting proper sleep
6. Connecting with people using technology or by sending cards or letters
7. Create a calm box or basket (include items such as coloring books, markers or crayons, thinking putty, yarn, etc.)

L – Learn

It is vital that we learn the facts about the coronavirus pandemic or COVID-19 and how we can best protect others and ourselves. This information is located on the CDC.gov website. We can also use this time to learn something new. For instance, maybe learning a new language or writing the next great novel could be potential possibilities. Although none of us want to be quarantined in our homes, Shakespeare's work was significantly influenced while quarantined during the Bubonic Plaque. Although we don't need to put pressure on ourselves to write a great play or become fluent in French, we may find it helpful to spend time nurturing our love of learning in some unique way.

M - Mindfulness

The practice of mindfulness seems simple in theory but it will require redirecting your thoughts and bringing your focus back to the present. We all have the ability to stay present and to stay aware of what we are doing and where we are in the moment. If we stay in the present, it will help us to not be as reactive or as overwhelmed by the events

going on around us. This is a great time to work on being mindful and to redirect our thoughts back to what we can do now versus letting our thoughts wander to the future and what might happen. There are some excellent ways we can begin a practice of mindfulness. We can mindfully walk around our yard and notice the signs of spring. We can mindfully wash the dishes or do the laundry. We can mindfully eat and really focus on the smell and taste of our food. We can also gently redirect our focus back to the present by using the 3-2-1 technique, which requires finding three things you can see, three things you can hear and three things you can smell/touch/taste, then two of each and then one of each. There are also several phone apps and youtube videos available to help with the practice of mindfulness (see resources below).

In conclusion, it is important to note that even though we are all experiencing the same event, there are multiple ways we will choose to cope with the event. The hope is we will remain supportive of one another and we will remain calm and use C.A.L.M. as we weather this coronavirus pandemic. Additionally, the resources and guidance provided in this article are just recommendations and only begin to address the question about how we can stay mentally and emotionally healthy during the coronavirus pandemic.

Please Note

It is highly recommended to consult your healthcare provider if additional medical assistance is required. Most healthcare providers are using telehealth (meeting with providers via the internet) to provide initial or continued service to their patients.

List of Resources – Please note this list is not exhaustive and additional resources will be added

APA.org

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

<https://www.apa.org/news/apa/2020/03/newly-remote-workers>

<https://www.apa.org/news/apa/2020/03/covid-19-research-findings>

<https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/pandemics>

<https://www.apa.org/practice/programs/dmhi/research-information/social-distancing>

Psychology Tools

<https://www.psychologytools.com/psychological-resources-for-coronavirus-covid-19/>

<https://www.psychologytools.com/articles/free-guide-to-living-with-worry-and-anxiety-amidst-global-uncertainty/>

https://emergingminds.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID19_advice-for-parents-and-carers_20.3_.pdf

Mindfulness Apps

Insighttimer.com

Smilingmind.com.au

Stopbreathetink.com

Calm

Mindfulfamily

Headspace Meditation

Youtube Relaxation/Stress Videos

Progressive Muscle Relaxation for kids and adults!

Sesame Street: Common and Colbie Caillat Belly Breathe with Elmo