

Coronavirus fears: Ways to keep calm

Presenter – Lynn Borteck, Clinical Counselor

Welcome today's presentation called, corona virus fears: ways to keep calm. My name is Lynn Borteck, and I'm a clinical social worker. And I, like you, and like millions of other people are kind of on the edge of our seats these days, because of the ever-changing news about the corona virus. And so, I wanted to bring something to you to help you, to give you some tools, to use to help keep your anxiety under control, because it's a very anxious time.

Today we're going to discuss:

Why is the corona virus creating so much fear? Why generally things that are new and unknown, make us anxious? We're going to talk about what we really know, about the corona virus without getting into any medical details really. We're going to discuss how you can handle your emotions around what's going on. And I'm going to teach you a little acronym. How you can keep calm during the corona virus outbreak.

The virus is new and unknown. Why is that so alarming?

It is totally normal and natural to be anxious about the unknown. That's just how we human beings are built. When we feel out of control, we get very uncomfortable, and we react in a number of ways that we wouldn't react, if we were feeling in control. When we can identify the enemy, so to speak, or the unknown, in this case the corona virus, we can plan and organize if we want to. We have that sense of control. However, when the enemy is unknown, or mysterious, or new, we don't have the ability to plan and organize, we feel out of control, and that in and of itself is very anxiety-provoking.

What do we actually know?

So, what do we know about the coronavirus right now? Well, recently the World Health Organization has called it a pandemic which really is a way of saying that it has spread to a specific number of countries and affected a specific number of people. We also know, luckily that experts around the world are hard at work to answer all the questions we have about the coronavirus and to try to bring to everyone the answers that we're waiting for.

The thing about the corona virus, is that it's new, and because it's new, we don't have any immunities against it, and that's why it is scary to people, and scary to doctors and so forth, who are

hurrying to find out some of the answers that we need to get. We're not yet 100% certain about the ways that it can be spread, it seems that it can only be spread through your mouth, your nose, or your eyes, through droplets when like someone sneezes, or you touch a surface that has corona virus on it, and then proceed touch your eyes, nose or mouth. That's what it seems at this point. So that's what we know.

And I have to say, it is an "infodemic". And an infodemic is when there is so much information, a lot of it wrong, a lot of it misinformation or disinformation, then that promotes all of the fears and anxieties that can come around about this type of new illness, or it can happen when there's a hurricane coming, or any other kind of thing that we humans really can't control. When there's an infodemic, we really need to take some steps, to control the information that we receive, because that information can make a big difference to how we feel and respond to the anxieties.

How can you handle your emotions?

So, let's talk about how can you handle your emotions. If you're a normally anxious person, and I would rate myself among the normally anxious people, it's pretty easy right now, to find yourself feeling more anxious than usual, because there's so much unknown, because there's so much information and disinformation, circulating. And even people who typically don't get worried about things are finding that they're not immune from the feelings that are going around now. Even they are feeling anxious. The thing is that anxiety doesn't help you, and it doesn't make the virus go away. So, here's a good plan. Number one is to acknowledge your fears. It's okay, you can be afraid. Lots of us are uncomfortable and fearful. Second, know that it's totally normal and human to have whatever emotions you have. And third, find some ways to actually harness your anxiety. On the next slides we're going to discuss ways to stay calm, which is an acronym that I hope will help you.

Tips for keeping CALM

C – Use your coping skills

C is the first letter in calm, and C stands for use your coping skills. This is not your first rodeo, that's my guess. We've been through lots of scary things before. You know, depending upon where you are in life, you may have lived through 911, or the various bombings and terrorist activities, and also other illnesses. So, we've had anxieties before, and you've coped before. So, one of the things I want you to do, is to start giving yourself messages of I can, rather than lots of negative messages, like, what will I do if? Or what's going to happen if? Because those are scary negative messages. And then think about the tools that you've used in the past. What has helped you cope in the past? Usually getting distracted is really helpful. And that can mean sitting with a fun and enjoyable book. It can mean turning on all of your favorite comedies, or watching a comedic movie, or just an engrossing

movie, it doesn't have to be funny, but laughing is very stress relieving. You can use relaxation techniques, perhaps you like yoga, or maybe you like to walk or meditate. All of those are helpful, even just deep breathing. Being mindful is really helpful and being mindful is just appreciating the right now-ness of every moment, and not letting your mind wander to what's going to happen. Also staying connected to other people. I know that right now we're being told to consider social distancing, which is to avoid very big social gatherings, and so forth, but you can still connect to friends, assuming that you know that they're not ill, you can still connect by phone. There's lots of ways to connect, and you can go outside, go walking together, play tennis together, do something with other people because that always takes your mind off of things. So, C stands for use your coping skills.

A – Be aware, but not obsessed.

So, you want stay informed about what's going on, but you want to stay informed through reliable sources, okay? So if you turn on the TV, or turn on the radio, or whatever you like to get your information from, you're going to hear a lot of news, but it may not all be consistent, and it may not all be true. So, what you want to do, is you want to limit your listening, and your taking in of information from sources that we know are reliable, and I'm going to be giving you those sources in another slide or two. Also, don't feed your anxiety, by participating in gossip, like I heard that her brother's sister's husband's mother's brother, got sick doing such and such. All that does is make you more anxious, make you more prone to be worried, and it's not helpful. So, try not to listen to rumors or generate rumors. Try to do as much normal as you can. And remember to keep enjoyment primary, because that is so important to controlling your emotions.

L – Learn from reliable sources

The L in calm is learn from reliable sources, which I mentioned just a few moments ago. Let me just say, that social media is not a good place to learn about the corona virus. Social media has its place in our lives for sure, but it is not a good place to look for facts about corona virus. So, really limit how much time you spend catching up on the latest on social media.

Reliable sources include the World Health Organization, also known as WHO, which you can find at who.int. And another really reliable source, is our own Centers for Disease Control, also known as the CDC. And their website is cdc.gov. Okay, both of these websites are staffed by professionals. What you hear there is not going to be rumor. It's not going to be something that you have to question, or not trust. It's going to be hopefully helpful.

M – Monitor yourself

And finally, the M in calm is monitor yourself. Take care of yourself during this time, by making sure that you're still eating healthy, that you're keeping your regular sleep schedule, and exercise. You

know exercise is so important, in terms of defusing anxiety. It's so important in terms of controlling stress. And so, I really want to emphasize that eating, and getting good sleep, and getting your normal exercise, is really critical. If you feel sick, stay home. And if you know of somebody who's sick, try to stay away from them. Also, and of course, we've heard this a lot, wash your hands a lot. And the typical advice is to sing happy birthday to you, while you're washing your hands, because that pretty much guarantees that you're going to be watching your hands for about 20 to 30 seconds. Obviously, when there's an illness in the house, any kind of cold or flu, we take certain precautions and do that. If you're coughing or sneezing, sneeze into your elbow, cough into your elbow, keep tissues in the house and that kind of thing. Again, stay away from other people, who are either well or ill, if you're not feeling well. However, at the same time I want to say, don't protect yourself, to the point that you're isolating yourself, because, again, that's a big anxiety producer. Being all by yourself, what we tend to do is imagine the worst-case scenario, and we don't know what the scenario is going to be. It's all evolving now, and so that's why I want you to please try to use C-A-L-M, to keep your anxieties under control.

Use your skills to control your emotions

Finally, aside from staying calm, get support from friends or family, or perhaps you have a professional therapist that you know, or maybe it's a good time to make acquaintance with a counselor, or therapist to deal with your anxieties. Remember, you're not the only one feeling this way now. Lots of people are, and for goodness sakes, stay away from things and people that you know are only going to make you feel worse. If you have a friend or relative, who is always the nervous Nelly, or always is worried about the most awful thing that can happen, try to avoid contact with that person, or cut way down on it. Remember that right now you can't take control of the corona virus, but you can take control of yourself and your emotions. And I hope that you do, and I hope very much that today's webinar is helpful to you, and that you'll look back on it, if you need to, and remind yourself of the steps of staying calm. Thank you for listening.

Resources For Living

The EAP is administered by Resources For Living, LLC. This material is for informational purposes only. Information is not a substitute for professional health care and is not meant to replace the advice of health care professionals. Contact a health care professional with any questions or concerns about specific health care needs.