

Your New Normal

Presenter – Lynn Borteck, Clinical Counselor

Welcome everybody to today's webinar which is called "Your New Normal: What Will You Change? And What Will You Keep?" My name is Lynn Borteck and I'm happy to bring you this webinar which is really a lot of questions for you to consider about how you will proceed in your life after COVID settles down, after things start resuming their normal shape. What have you learned, what kinds of changes might you be interested in making?

COVID-19 has changed our world

There's no question that COVID-19 has changed our life, but I want you to think about whether it's been all bad. Remember times when before COVID when you were so frenzied and running around trying to do everything all at once and multitasking and trying to make everyone happy and you thought to yourself, stop the world, I just want to get off? Well it's happened. It's a once in a lifetime opportunity when we've all been sent home and told to shelter in place and take other types of security measures, and we've had to stop doing a lot of things that we were doing in our maybe very crazy lives. And so in fact we do have an opportunity now to take a look at our lives and maybe make some new decisions.

What have you lost during COVID?

First of all, all of us have lost things during COVID, there's no question about that. Sadly very tragically, many of us have lost loved ones and that is just something that's almost hard to bear. And we'll have to grieve that. Other issues have been just your normal routine, your normal work schedule, your normal kid's life, they're going to school and coming home and going to after school activities and having plays and graduations and you're being able to socialize and get together with friends, going to the movies, going out to dinner, hugging and kissing loved ones who aren't living in your home, going to visit elders, if you have elderly relatives or friends in nursing homes or assisted living facilities. And basically just the freedom to go and do what you want, where you want it, with whom you want to, and feel safe without having to glove up and mask up. And make no doubt about it, these are losses and for those of you who are feeling kind of depressed at times or angry at times as most of us are, part of that is because we are grieving so many of these losses.

What opportunities have you gained?

However, at the same time, we have gained opportunities. And those opportunities include a chance to just sit back and see our lives differently. Everything is so different in everyone's life. We can't go to work most of us. Many of us have to work from home or find some other arrangement, we may have kids at home, it's really a time to see life differently, and a time to think about how important it is to have time and contact, physical contact, with loved ones. I know for myself I dearly miss hugging and spending time just hanging out with my kids and my grandkids. And now we all get a chance to see the entire world and our lives through a whole new lens and to make some different choices if we want to about how we're going to live life after COVID restrictions are lifted, whenever that might be, and it's not happening now across the country. There are some areas where there have been some of the restraints have been eased, but overall we're still living with COVID restrictions. This webinar though is to make you think about how you'd like your life to look after those restrictions go away. So basically it's a coronavirus exit strategy.

How will your “new normal” look?

So I ask you, how would you like your new normal to look? What have you learned through living through COVID? First of all, what were you doing before COVID arrived that you really really miss? At the same time, what were you doing before COVID that you really really don't miss? I can tell you for myself, I used to feel that if I didn't get to the gym at five AM every single day of the week that life just wouldn't be the same. And now that the gyms are closed and I've had to find my exercise elsewhere like walking outside and doing some virtual classes on TV using the TV or using the internet, I have found that, you know what? It's kind of terrific not to have to get up at five AM and I'm able to get my exercise in other ways. So even when COVID restrictions are gone, I'm not sure I'll go back to that. That was adding to the kind of craziness of my life and my exhaustion.

I also wonder what plans or bucket list wishes were you putting on the back burner, thinking yeah, I'll do that five years from now, or 20 years from now. And I'm wondering how you might see that differently. I know that my husband and I have been talking about how fortunate it is just by chance that we traveled a great deal for many many years. We've gone to so many places and thank goodness, those places are not on our bucket list. So we feel fortunate about that. But if you do have plans and ideas and just desires that you were putting off for who knows when in the future, that might be something that you want to reconsider and possibly work into your new normal a little sooner.

What have you learned about the people in your life?

What have you learned about the people in your life during COVID? So much has changed with social distancing, and yet we can connect with people. So my question is who do you connect with during COVID? Who don't you connect with? Who do you miss, and who don't you miss? Who has been very supportive to you, maybe listening when you needed to cry or complain or be angry about things or listen to you when you're happy about things? Who showed up for you during this time?

And also what effect do you think COVID has had on your marriage or partnership or intimate relationship because those of us who are in those kinds of relationships, we may be used to living with our spouses or partners but we're not necessarily used to being around them 24/7 and COVID has definitely given us that 24/7 exposure which is not always easy. People wind up arguing more, getting under each other's skin and this is all normal. And it's important to think about the things that you have learned, things that you might want to talk about at a future time. Things that you will need to forgive about each other and so forth.

What activities have kept you going?

What activities have kept you going? What have you been doing during COVID? Have you been starting some new hobbies? Do you have pets that you love to be around? I myself got a new pet and I'm so thrilled. Have you been volunteering your time doing some kind of virtual help or going food shopping for other people if you're in a low risk category? Do you have virtual activities and exercises like I said, you can go virtual yoga and meditation and Zumba classes and I think that people are playing games online via Zoom and other video enabled platforms. Have you been exercising differently like me? Or exercising for the first time, or exercising more or less? Have you been using video chat so that you can connect with others or even keep up your usual clubs like maybe you have a book club that has met via Zoom or social meetups? Have you been watching more movies or TV shows that you find you're enjoying? What else have you been doing to keep yourself happy and content as possible, and what have you learned about yourself from those activities?

How has your self-care and self-image changed?

How has your self-care and self-image changed? It's hard when you don't have access to your barber shop, your hair stylist, and other people who provided personal services to you like massage or whatever. Perhaps you are gray as I am and grayer because you haven't been able to get your hair colored. Have you stopped putting on makeup? Have you been shaving on a different schedule if you are a fellow with a beard or mustache? Overall, how important has appearance become?

Because most of us I think are seeing less and less people. Maybe you might have a zoom meeting where you are all seeing each other or a video meeting, and how have you been dressing for those? Is it more casual than usual? Have you been doing your hair a little differently? If you're a woman, have you been putting on a little bit of makeup for those meetings?

Certainly these things all signify changes, and I'm curious, I'd like you to think about how these changes might have a permanent impact on you. Are you going to go a little more natural from now on? Are you just can't, can you just not wait to be able to put on your nice work clothes again and go to work? What have you taken away from that change?

Opportunities

Let's talk about opportunities. What kinds of opportunities or experiences were you letting go by? Like for instance, were you working so hard that you weren't getting to spend enough time with your family or your kids? Were you missing out on days of being at home and playing around in the backyard or going to the beach or being with friends and family, maybe doing things good for yourself like meditating or doing yoga or traveling as we've said before or adventuring in some other way. What other opportunities have you been letting pass you by that you might want to do now? Maybe starting a new career, maybe learning a new language. What are some of the things that you realize are opportunities that you might now be able to take advantage of if you'd like to make a choice to go in a different direction. You have that chance now.

What have you learned about yourself?

And what have you learned about yourself? What an amazing time to learn things about yourself when you've been shut down, locked down because of COVID, what have you found in terms of your coping skills? Have you found that you have more resilience, more ability to bounce back, more ability to just put up with the whole thing than you thought? Have you found new ways to connect? And I will say that that's a big one for me.

I'm not the most technologically skilled human being, but I have found that I've been eager to learn new technologies to connect with people. I've been FaceTiming and Zooming and doing all kinds of different things to connect with the loved ones in my life and I've learned a lot that I honestly never was all that interested in. And I found that you know what? I can do this, it works. I found that I'm adaptable, and this is something that I learned about in an article that I read in the New York Times that human beings are incredibly adaptable. They can adapt to almost any situation, and I believe that if you think about yourself, maybe think about what you assumed life would be like under these socially distanced shelter in place circumstances and think about how it has actually been for you.

Maybe it's been really awful and maybe it's been hard, but I still wonder, what have you done to adapt? And I bet if you think really hard about it and deep about it, you'll come up with some answers and you might really surprise yourself about ways that you've adapted and found some new strengths.

Conclusion

I'd like to end with this quote: "When you're uncomfortable, that's when you learn "something new about yourself." I think that's the perfect quote for this situation. We've all been made uncomfortable. We've been anxious, we've been feeling perhaps unsafe and maybe you've been having trouble sleeping and maybe you've had to be there for your children or for other people in your life who have also been uncomfortable. But that's the time when we do learn, when we do make changes or decide to take a different path and I think that's a really important thing to remember, that even out of things that aren't really great, there are still some pluses that come out of them.

Thank you very very much for attending and good luck as you go forward into your post COVID life as soon as we are told that it is safe to do so. And I hope that you will give it a lot of thought and I wish you luck. Thank you.

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