

# COVID-19 fears: Ways to keep calm

***Presenter – Lynn Borteck, Clinical Counselor***

Hello, my name is Lynn Borteck and I'm a social worker. I'm here today to talk to you about ways to stay calm during our COVID-19 experience, and CALM is an acronym, and I going to be explaining what each letter stands for and ways that it can help you. Basically, staying calm is a way to cope and coping is using methods that work for you to keep your stress under control and that's really important for each and every one of us.

## Tips for keeping CALM

### **C – Use your coping skills**

So let's start with C, the C in CALM. It stands for using your coping skills, and here's how you can do that. You can think about past challenges that you have faced, because this one may be very, very unique, but you've had other challenges in your life before. Perhaps you've had serious illnesses, maybe you've lived through hurricanes, or tornadoes or floods. Perhaps you lived through 9/11, and all of these are things that we needed to make adjustments for and use our strengths. A lot us of have built strengths to cope with these losses and uncertainties.

Also, give yourself positive messages. Those are messages like, I can and I will, rather than oh my goodness, what if, and how can I possibly do this? So by giving yourself these positive messages and trying to block out those negative messages, you really keep yourself more on balance and feeling better. And this is important. Don't downplay this in your mind. It's really important to control the messages that you are giving yourself. Then you need to accept the difference between what you can control overall and what you can't control. And right now, we can't control the coronavirus. So we need to accept that, and we need to again, use our coping skills and strengths to move on and to do what we can.

So some of the proactive coping tools would be things like reading or listening to books on tape or listening to books on Audible. Spending time using and enjoying humor, whether that be watching old funny movies that you love, or enjoying some of these funny jokes that are coming around that are a little bit of dark humor about our situation, but a lot of them are pretty funny, and it's good to laugh. Humor is really good. Laughing is a wonderful stress reliever. You can also watch old favorite movies and TV shows, like I know my husband and I are on our, I think, 500th watching of "When Harry Met Sally." We enjoy it, it brings us pleasure, and feel free to do that kind of stuff.

You can also connect with other people. You can't connect with them physically, but you can connect with them using Skype or FaceTime, or the telephone, or email, or whatever. It's also very important to get outside and exercise.

Exercising starts the flow of chemicals and hormones in your body that really do boost your mood, and it's important, because it's a little depressing or can be depressing to be social distanced from our friends and family.

And so we want to do things that make us feel good, and also you can relax through using meditation techniques, deep breathing, yoga, anything that works for you, and you can go onto YouTube and other apps and find free classes that are being given right now in some of these methods. So if you're thinking, gosh I never did yoga, or I don't know how to meditate, go online and look for an introductory class and learn something new. It's a great time to learn something new.

### **A – Be aware, but not obsessed.**

So the A in CALM stands for being aware, but not obsessed. So you want to stay informed about COVID-19 through reliable sources and you don't want to feed your own sense of helplessness or anxiety by listening to neighborhood gossip or gossip on wherever you get it, and rumors and so forth.

Also, try to keep a somewhat normal schedule in your life, even if you just need to be around your house, which most of us do, try to get up at about the same time that you would anyway, shower, get yourself dressed. Maybe you don't need to put on your usual work clothes, but do get yourself up and try to keep to a similar schedule that you would if these were normal times.

And always remember to keep enjoyment on your radar. Try to, if you have a pet, lucky you, enjoy your pet. Enjoy whatever brings you pleasure, that's important.

### **L – Learn from reliable sources**

The L stands for learn from reliable sources, and I want to emphasize social media is not a reliable source. So when you see things on whatever social medium you use and enjoy, please don't take those things that you read as being necessarily true. And in fact, some people and some organizations are even spreading disinformation, which is really awful.

But you should be going to reliable sources, like the World Health Organization at [who.int](https://www.who.int), or the Centers for Disease Control, which is at [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov). These are the places to get your very reliable information.

Now I know you know you want to watch the news, and I guess we all feel little bit or a lot maybe of a need to keep up with what's going on, but you have to limit how much time you spend doing that, because right now, on top of having coronavirus, we have another info-demic. It's an info-demic where we're being really overwhelmed with information, and a lot of it we don't need. Things we don't need to know, things that are not going to help us, stories that are not going to make us feel better. So limit how much time you spend with the TV on, with the news on, checking the internet, and do make sure that where you get your information is a reliable source.

## **M - Monitor yourself**

And finally, the M in CALM is monitoring yourself. If you don't take good care of yourself, you can't take care of anyone else. So you need to remember to keep eating healthy foods and meals, get enough sleep and maintain your exercise or workout routines or start new ones.

Again, as I'm going to repeat it, because it bears repeating, when you exercise, you release feel-good hormones throughout your body, and we all need those feel-good helpers at this time.

Follow the current guidelines for your state for staying home and social distancing.

And remember, of course, to wash your hands frequently and follow all the hygiene rules that are being promoted.

## **Add your own positive spin**

Now that we have covered CALM, C-A-L-M, I just want to add that you can add your own positive spin. Remember, we can't control COVID-19 right now, but we can control how we react. So I want to mention expect to feel a little bit down at times and plan for self-help if needed.

For instance, it's great to be with our families, our partners, our spouse, our kids, if we live with them, but there are going to be times when nerves are a little bit frayed and we have to expect that, we have to see it as normal, because tensions are high, and self-help would be everybody separating for a little while, or maybe everybody going outside together for a little while or going out alone. Do these things when you need to and realize that everything you're feeling right now is normal. Do try to avoid misuse of alcohol, and or any other substances for coping.

Also, spend some time each day thinking of some positives. There are positives that are going to come out of here, out of this situation. You're going to have more together time with your kids and spouse, partner or roommate. You can have a chance to catch up by phone or video call with old friends or family members, or high school friends or college friends, or anyone you don't see or talk to frequently. It's the perfect time to start a project you've had on the back burner. Maybe you want

to clean out your garage or closets. Maybe you want to start writing a book or keeping a journal about what's going on. This is a great time to start any new project.

You can do this. We can all do this. It's a very challenging, difficult time, but we can do this. So stay calm and keep your spirits up. Thank you.

## **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.

©2020 Resources For Living | 44.36.900.1-100411 A (3/20)