

“Coping with COVID-19”

Zoom meeting with Kelli Drenner, PhD, Public Health

Sponsored by St. Andrews Presbyterian,

Science in Congregations Ministry

April 11, 2020

About Dr. Kelli Drenner:

1. Kelli has a PhD in Public Health from UT.
2. She teaches at University of Houston.
3. She specializes in CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy).

Opening Remarks

- We need to be thinking about Mental Health. The social determinants of mental health are playing out in the data during this pandemic.
- When we think about mental health, we need to be aware of the toll that COVID-19 is taking on all of us, especially our health care workers. Our health care workers are seeing record numbers of people suffering and dying. We need to be aware of the PTSD that may occur in them and in us.

How are we coping? How are we going to get through this?

1. Nobody plans for a pandemic. We could not imagine what it would be like with all the physical distancing that we are required to engage in presently.
2. Grief is the feeling that we are having trouble naming.
 - a. We have lost big things like the NCAA tournament, Prom, Graduation, and everyday stability.
 - b. We have everyday losses also, like missing our relationships with others.
 - c. We fear what we may lose.
3. Cognitive Behavior Therapy says that our thinking affects our behavior and visa versa
 - a. Negative thoughts can shift our mood to a negative place.
 - b. We can fall into despair with all the negative reports that we are hearing.
 - c. We need to become aware of the thoughts and feelings that we are having. It is helpful to name our feelings so that we are aware of them and where they come from.
 - d. We forget to notice the positive things going on. We need to look for the positive and the joy amid the bad things that are happening.
 - e. Change is a challenge.

Why are the social distancing guidelines so difficult on us?

1. The research shows that social support builds resilience.
2. When we have physical distance from our social support it is a large loss. We are more alone, and it can feel as though we have lost our anchors.
3. We need to find a way to still have some social support during this strange time.
4. This change is a challenge. We can feel that we have lost a sense of structure.

Kelli's Experience: The Hard and Helpful

1. Being alone has been difficult.
 - a. To mitigate this, she has organized a Zoom Happy Hour with friends.
 - b. Paint by numbers for adults has been an exercise in mindfulness and a break from technology.
 - c. Reaching out to friends has been helpful.
2. Some people are lonely, and others are frenetic.
 - a. These two groups of people can remind each other of different ways to look at things.
 - b. Encourage each other in mindfulness and prayer.
 - c. Zoom or call one another.
3. Her students have been helping each other during class in the chat window. They have talked a lot about COVID-19.

Some Questions from the listeners:

Q1: We all need physical touch each day. How does one deal with not having this?

- We all need touch. So, if you live with others, make sure that you hug them and touch them.
- Be kind to yourself.
- Appreciate your own body and your strengths.
- Find out what you are good at.
- Practice mindfulness

Q2: This individual works in healthcare and is feeling angry that they do not have enough PPE and are unable to use their own personal PPE. How do I deal with this anger?

- Kelli is praying for our healthcare workers and deeply concerned about them.
- Turn your anger into action if possible.
- Talk with those who 'hear' you.
- There are things that we can do as a church or as an individual to help those in the healthcare field.
 - Vote
 - Complain to individuals who can do something about it.

- Take this crisis seriously.
- Do not let this go and remember it when you vote.
- Public Health individuals saw this crisis looming in January 2020. I wish leaders took it seriously sooner.

Q3: How do I deal with frustrations with sharing child custody during this time?

- We cannot change other people. The best that we can do is to manage our own behavior.
- Be the best human that you can be.

Q4: How do we talk to children about COVID-19?

- Children can feel as though this is going to last forever. Remind them that it is serious but not everyone is going to die.
- Keep a positive framework.
- Remind them that their actions affect others.
- Get them involved in helping by dropping off food or other things that they can do.

Redemption during this time?

1. Physical distance brings us closer in other ways.
2. We are reaching out more.
3. We are calling and keeping in touch with each other.
4. We are helping each other as we are able. If you find some help share some help.
5. We are connecting in a deeper way to others.

Strategies for coping:

1. Structure your day.
2. There has been a lot more cooking going on during COVID-19.
3. There are apps that help with mindfulness: Calm and Headspace are two of them.
4. Exercise to improve your mood and for general health.
5. Getting outside, go for a walk, and enjoy nature.
6. Telehealth resources... uclahealth.org, taoconnect.org...for mindful meditations, mental health check in, breathing, body scan, relaxation, Stephen's ministers at St. A's, reach out to Kelli, and gratitude lists
7. Social support