



ADA Live!

Episode 79 (Part 1 of 3): Protecting Your Mental Health during the Coronavirus Outbreak

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Speakers: Doreen Marshall, Vice President of Programs at the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)

Host: Barry Whaley, Director of the Southeast ADA Center

Doreen Marshall: Hi. I'm Dr. Doreen Marshall and you're listening to ADA Live.

4 Wheel City: (rapping)

Barry Whaley: Hi, everybody. On behalf of the Southeast ADA Center, the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University, and the ADA National Network, I want to welcome you to Episode 79, Part One, of a special series on mental health during the coronavirus outbreak. I want to welcome you to ADA Live. My name is Barry Whaley. I'm the Director at the Southeast ADA Center. And I want to remind you that you can submit your questions about the ADA at any time at ADALive.org.

The coronavirus, COVID-19, has now become a worldwide pandemic. And among the populations who are most susceptible, and vulnerable, and at higher risk of becoming infected and seriously ill, are people who have disabilities resulting from chronic health conditions such as heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, as well as people like me who are over age 60. So across the US many folks have been sheltering in place for at least a

couple of weeks now. And with our self-quarantine comes worry, stress, anxiety, maybe sadness or frustration. So we wanted to talk about that today.

Our guest is Dr. Doreen Marshall, and we'll be discussing what we can all do to take care of our mental health in these unprecedented times. So Dr. Marshall, I want to welcome you to the show.

Doreen Marshall: Thanks for having me.

Barry Whaley: So Dr. Marshall, you recently wrote an article Protecting Your Mental Health During the Coronavirus Outbreak. It's interesting is that particular title is on a resource page we've developed on coronavirus that we'll talk about later in the episode. It was just a great article. In that article you share some tips for folks who are dealing with worry, with stress, with anxiety. So let's start with what are some strategies those of us who are feeling overwhelmed can practice to take care of ourselves?

Doreen Marshall: That's a great question and certainly was one of the reasons I wrote the article. This situation that we find ourselves in with COVID-19 is really uncharted territory for us as individuals, families, and certainly as a country. I think the most important thing I can convey to folks right now is to not forget about the basics, meaning doing the things that we already know, take care of our physical health because that has a great impact on our mental health as well. So doing things like trying to keep regular bedtimes, and making sure that you're drinking enough water, and trying to stay away from the temptation to consume a lot of junk food right now. Those things that we can do to take care of our physical health will also help us be more resilient in terms of our mental health.

The other thing I've been really talking to folks about is to try not to get too far ahead in our thinking. I think a lot of worry and anxiety comes from the things we look way ahead to think about, and if as much as possible if we could try and keep ourselves in the moment and to deal with the next thing in front of us and not think about, "Well, what's going to happen next month? Or what's going to happen three months from now? I think just facing the things in front of us is really one way people can contain the worry.

And then the third thing that I've been saying to people that's really important right now is to focus on what you can control, and those are big things and small, right? But the most important thing we can control is just taking a moment to breathe. When we're all anxious, I think it's very easy to hold our breath or to be breathing really shallow, and we know deep breath really can help us promote a sense of relaxation right now.

Barry Whaley: That's great. Some practical advice. So take care of our physical health, don't get out of our usual routines, don't get ahead in our thinking I think that's very important, and then focus on what we can control because a lot of this we just cannot control. So, excellent advice.

Dr. Marshall, I am curious though, because some folks listening today, obviously along with the pandemic we have the economic collapse and so folks may be worried about food, or money, or housing, perhaps they've lost their job. So what are some strategies that might help folks who have those worries?

Doreen Marshall: Well, I think those are important and legitimate worries. One of the things we know is that when our basic sense of safety and functioning in the world is threatened that makes all of our anxieties higher and worse. But I think one thing to remind and reassure ourselves about is that there has never been a time when we've been more connected as a society, when we've been more aware of each other's struggles, and when that connectedness happens I think what also comes along with it is more solutions.

So, what I'm seeing happen is that people are getting really creative about how to support one another, how to make sure that people are staying connected, including around those basic needs. I've seen lots of people just finding each other toilet paper right now, and doing those things that I think help promote our sense of connectedness as a society.

So if I were talking to someone who is really worried about the basics right now, the few things I would say to them is to not be afraid to reach out because there are people who are helping each other, and to not be afraid to put that out there and say, "I'm having this

situation where I'm in need." I think what we'll find is that there are lots of people who are ready to help each other.

And then the other piece of advice may be if you are living alone and feeling uncertain, is to do your best to stay connected however that means. Whether that's staying connected via phone, or staying connected, if you have technology available through video chats, there's lots of online groups right now to support one another. I mean really using the technology that's available to us to stay connected to those resources as much as we can.

Barry Whaley: That's very good advice. So, we know that in times of crisis that the best side of us comes out. Someone who may be struggling, all they have to do is ask, so that's very good. And living alone, that's an interesting thing and we'll talk about that in a minute and that isolation.

I want to stop for a moment. ADA Live listening audience, if you have questions about this topic or any other ADA Live topics, you can submit your questions online at ADALive.org or you can call the Southeast ADA Center at +1 404-541-9001. Again, that's 404-541-9001. Let's pause for a word from our featured organization, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

4 Wheel City: (rapping)

Voice Over Announcement: American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, or AFSP, was established in 1987, and is a voluntary health organization that gives those affected by suicide a nationwide community empowered by research, education, and advocacy, to take action against this leading cause of death.

AFSP is dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those effected by suicide. AFSP creates a culture that is smart about mental health by engaging in the following core strategies: funding scientific research; educating the public about mental health and suicide prevention; advocating for public policies in mental health and suicide prevention; supporting survivors of suicide loss; and those affected by suicide is our mission.

Headquartered in New York and with a public policy office in Washington DC, AFSP has local chapters in all 50 States with programs and events nationwide. Learn more about AFSP by visiting their website AFSP.org.

Barry Whaley: Hey everybody, and welcome back. We've been discussing how to take care of our mental health in this unprecedented time of the coronavirus outbreak. Let me ask another question if I could, what if I notice that perhaps somebody I live with or somebody that I care about is experiencing anxiety and depression? What are some strategies? What are some things that I can do to help, Dr. Marshall?

Doreen Marshall: I think the most important thing right now is to keep the dialogue open. If someone in your life is struggling, or maybe they were struggling with anxiety or depression before this even happened, and now you're wondering how are they doing in light of these new stressors? I think just checking in with them regularly saying, "I know this is a lot," and really focusing on the practical things that we can all do that's within our control. Certainly, staying connected to those that might be struggling, and also being okay sharing. This is hard for all of this, but we are in this together, and reassuring them.

I think part of the challenge about anxiety and depression is that they're illnesses that really isolate people. And so the more we can do things to reach out, to stay connected, and to not be afraid to ask specific questions like, "How are you doing with your anxiety?" Or, "Have you been feeling more depressed since this has all happened?" And really making it okay to talk about their mental health, I think that's really one of the more important things we can do.

One other thing I would add, is that resources like the crisis text line and the National Suicide Prevention lifeline are still in full operation. So if you're alone or if you're worried about someone, you can call and reach out to those lines and they can give you some guidance, and if you're the person struggling, they're accessible to you as well. Those systems are still in full operation even with what's happening with COVID-19.

Barry Whaley: If I needed to do that, how do I do that, Dr. Marshall?

Doreen Marshall: The National Lifeline, the number is 1-800-273-TALK, T-A-L-K, or +1 800-273-8255, and those numbers run 24/7, so you can call them and they will route you to a trained person. The crisis text line, you can text the word talk, T-A-L-K, to 741-741. Again, text the word talk, T-A-L-K, to 741-741. And what you will get is a trained person who will respond to you via text and you can have a text exchange about what's currently happening or what you're concerned about.

Barry Whaley: Great. Excellent resources. Thank you so much. Dr. Marshall this presents a uniquely stressful situation for certain folks. I'm thinking about, a friend of mine who has quadriplegia and he relies on caregivers to come into his house and help him during the day. Also, folks who have addictions, perhaps folks who live in abusive situations who are now forced to be close proximity to someone who may be abusive. So are there some strategies for these folks to stay safe while sheltering in place?

Doreen Marshall: It's a great question, and I think we're all doing the best we can right now. And one of the challenges that you raised is that folks already have challenges in their lives, that this may add some additional problems or additional challenges. I think as much as people can, try and stay connected to support, and to their support network. For example, a caregiver that may come to visit to help with physical things, while they may not be able to come in the same way, or at the same frequency, or even at all, to stay connected because what we also get from those caregivers is a sense of emotional support or the sense that we're not alone.

And certainly for anyone in an abusive situation to stay connected or to reach out to the people who do help that person have a sense of not being alone. Certainly, as much as we can make our physical environments safe right now, that's the ideal. But I'm also mindful that there may be folks that are tackling much bigger problems in their lives that really the focus right now is on what we can control and then getting through each day. And so I was giving someone this advice just the other day where I said, "That problem was there before all this started and probably will be there after we're through this, but right now what to focus on are the things you can control and the things that help you

have a sense of safety in your own life." And that's going to be different for each one of us.

I think the other piece right now, that many people are home with other individuals that are home now that aren't usually because they're usually working or at school or other things, and as much as we can be mindful that that's a change in all of our living arrangements that we may need to adjust to, and really to be gentle with ourselves as much as we can in these times because there is a lot of change happening for all of us.

Barry Whaley: Thank you so much. That's an excellent response. Dr. Marshall, I want to thank you for being with us today. And do you have any final thoughts on staying mentally well in this current situation?

Doreen Marshall: One of the things I would just say is that our organization, The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, is really focused right now on helping people take care of their mental health. And so we are turning out lots of resources, as are many organizations, to help people take care of that. And those resources are free and also available online. So as much as folks feel ready to consume that kind of information, I'd encourage you to just keep checking in on our website and looking for the information we're putting out there. Our goal is really to support mental health at this challenging time.

Barry Whaley: Thank you so much. I appreciate it. Dr. Marshall, thanks for being with us. Thanks for being our guest today and sharing the important work that you're doing in the field of mental health, just excellent resources and excellent conversation with you today. And I want to thank our ADA Live listeners for joining us as well.

Our guests for this episode has been Dr. Doreen Marshall. She is the vice president of programs with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. For questions, comments on this podcast, you can submit them anytime online at ADALive.org. And remember listeners, the Southeast ADA Center has developed a comprehensive resource site for coronavirus information. You can find that site through our website, ADASoutheast.org.

Please take a look at it. We have a lot of resources specific for folks with disabilities in this very unusual time.

As a reminder, you can access all ADA Live episodes on our website, that's ADALive.org. Every episode is archived with streamed audio, accessible transcripts, and resources. You can listen to this broadcast on SoundCloud at SoundCloud ADA Live channel. That's soundcloud.com/ADALive. You can download ADA Live on your mobile device podcast icon by searching for ADA Live.

Listening audience, I also want to remind you that it is the 30th anniversary of The Americans with Disabilities Act. We'll celebrate every day year-round, but especially on July 26th of this year. Check out the ADA anniversary toolkit from the Southeast ADA Center in the ADA national network. The toolkit features logos, social media posts, monthly themes, and other resources to keep the celebration going. That's ADAanniversary.org.

Finally, if you have questions about the Americans with Disabilities Act, you can submit your questions anytime online at ADALive.org, or you can contact your regional ADA center at +1 800-949-4232. That's +1 800-949-4232. Remember, all calls are free and they're confidential.

ADA Live is a program of the Southeast ADA Center. Our producer is Celestia Ohrazda, with Beth Harrison, Mary Morder, Emily Ruber, Marsha Schwanke, and me, I'm Barry Whaley. Our music is from Four Wheel City: The Movement for Improvement. We will see you on the next episode of part two of this series, and stay safe everybody.

4 Wheel City: (rapping)

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