

It's (not) the end of the world as we know it....

Dr. Karl Laves (Associate Director, WKU Counseling Center)

This quote by Bennett is a bit crude, sure, but I think you see the point. In times of crisis, it is easy to get caught up in the anxiety and we starting seeing things through an exaggerated filter. We don't want to dismiss or ignore our anxiety, but we do want to keep a healthy perspective.

COVID-19 is a serious, life-threatening issue. Anyone can carry the virus and many do so without having the symptoms. It is natural for people to do one of two things in a situation like this. They either dismiss or ignore the threat or they over-react to the threat. With time, patience, and education we can react from someplace in the middle; we can be aware, cautious, but calm at the same time.

Every generation in our society has faced some kind of national or global threat. Humans have endured and lived through countless threats to humanity. Our society, our world, has faced other viruses, diseases, natural disasters, and wars. We don't fatalistically accept these events but we also don't let them change how we want to be as humans.

But it is hard to stay calm in the face of a crisis. Some of us were fortunate enough, by that I mean lucky, to have grown up surrounded by adults who knew how to stay calm while responding to disasters. We watched them, imitated them, and now as adults we act like them. We carry with us their beliefs that life is worth living no matter how hard. We believe, as they did, that life will be hard at times and we don't let that depress us. We believe that humans have the ability to rise above threats and disasters and find solutions. Those adults from our childhood showed us how we can hold on to our values and love for others even when we are afraid.

Think of it this way. Even when terrified of being injured or killed, firefighters still rush into burning buildings. They believe in their mission, they trust their training, and they trust each other. We can be like with COVID-19. We can isolate, keep ourselves clean (masks, hand washing, etc.) and we can continue to stay connected to each other through social media.

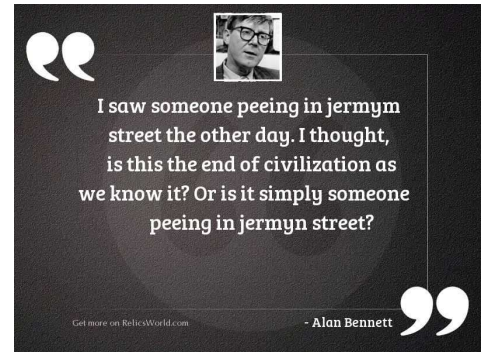
But this is taking so long, when will it end? Yes, waiting is hard. But waiting can be done. Take one day at a time, keep connected, stay informed, and stick to your plan. With time, in time, we will find ourselves in a future where we have survived, if not thrived, despite the virus.

None of us want this. Can we agree on that? This is not our choice, but this is our reality. We surrender to it or we rise above it. This is what people do. This is what people have been doing since the beginning of time. Staying positive is hard...but it can be done because we, humanity, have done it before. Anything we done once can be done again.

Few things help more, when we are going through a hard time, than knowing that we are not alone. You are not alone; you are surrounded by people who are just as scared, just as angry, and just as confused. And together we will live through this virus crisis.

So, think of the calm people you watched when you were younger. Be like them, live like them. You will begin to feel the confidence that they had. Yes, you will still be anxious, because you are alive. But you will also feel strong.

What if I didn't have calm people around me while I was growing up? What if my life was full of trauma or neglect? How do I learn those lessons if I didn't have good role models? Well, the thing about learning is that you can always learn. You are not limited by your past. Look around you, now. Find the people that are open, honest, afraid, yet calm. Imitate them. Borrow their beliefs, their behaviors. Practice being like them and as the days go by you will become like them.



It is hard to teach yourself how to be calm, but IT CAN BE DONE. Being hard doesn't mean you can't do it; it just means it will take time and practice. It is like so many other things that you learned to do. Like riding a bike. You didn't ride it the first time you got on it. It took time, but the more you tried, the easier it became. And yes, you probably took a few falls. But you were okay. After a band-aid or an ice pack, you got back on the bike and you kept riding. Dealing with the anxiety of this virus is not as simple as learning to ride a bike, but the principles are the same. You keep at it and each day you get a little bit better at being calm.

There is an old saying that goes something like "*Ain't nobody here but us chickens.*" I like this saying. To me it means we are all chickens, we are all afraid, but we are also all trying to be calm. Don't be anxious about being anxious; believe that you can learn how to calm yourself and then you won't be anxious about being anxious. You will realize that anxiety is a part of life; we can run from it or we can use it as information to decide what we want to do next.