



## Staples Spotlight Podcast Interview with Dr. MC - Tips for Managing Life During COVID-19

Julie: I'm Julie Kramer, and we are in the spotlight with Dr. Theresa Melito-Conners, she goes by Dr. MC. She is an administrator in a public school in the Greater Boston area. Theresa, thank you so much for joining us in the spotlight, very nice for you to do that while you are hunkering down in your home.

Dr. MC: Thank you, Julie

Julie: We're going to be talking a lot about self-care. Now you are the founder of "[Dr. MC's Self-Care Cabaret](#)." Tell me a little bit about that.

Dr. MC: Sure, so I recently graduated with my Ph.D. from Lesley University. The Ph.D. is in educational leadership, and the topic that I chose to study was Self-Care and Renewal for leaders and teachers specifically, but it does really embrace all people in general because taking care of ourselves is very, very important at all times. Out of that, I recognized there was a greater need to really promote these messages and help people take better care of themselves, so I started a [Facebook community](#), which I'm proud to say has grown to a thousand followers. People really seem to like the messages I'm sharing and the information that they can receive, so, in addition, I've also launched my website and a blog to accompany the website. On a weekly basis, I send out a blog and just really sharing the message and tips for people to take better care of themselves. I also regularly present at conferences in the area and provide professional development to the school district that I work in as well as to other schools in the area. So really, "[Dr. MC's Self-Care Cabaret](#)" kind of came out of my dissertation study that incorporates also my love for theater and my passion for self-care and helping people take better care of themselves.

Julie: We are in a very precarious time now, Theresa and taking care of ourselves is very important to do, but it seems awfully stressful right now. So let's talk about a few things that you think people can do to help de-stress and take care of yourself.

Dr. MC: Absolutely, these are unprecedented times, and you know, there's no rulebook for this. We're all kind of going through this together and experiencing this. COVID-19 has certainly thrown a wrench into a lot of things right now. I always think self-care is important, but of course, right now, it is extra critical. You know, while we're home and quarantined and following the social distancing precautions, make sure you're sticking to a routine, just as much as you can working from home. Get up, get dressed, put makeup on, eat, hydrate throughout the day, take breaks. It's really difficult and easy when you're working from home to kind of fall into a bad habit of; I'm working from home, let me just stay in my PJs. That will ultimately wear on your

emotional well-being and can lead to depression and other stressful symptoms that we certainly don't want. Things are stressful enough in the world right now. We don't need to add to it. We also want to make sure we are setting boundaries, again when you're working from home and social distancing and quarantined; you can feel like you have to always be checking social media, have to always be checking your email, your work email, on your phone and all that stuff. It's really okay, set those boundaries as if it was a typical workday; it's okay to shut your computer off and be done for the day, it's okay to take a break.

The other thing that's really, really important, is [moving](#). You know, we end up sitting on the couch all day in front of the TV, binge-watching Netflix. That's really not good for our bodies for a multitude of ways. We really need to move. It doesn't have to be extreme; it doesn't have to be crazy. Gentle stretches, gentle yoga poses, any type of little dance party you want to throw, anything you can do to just get the body moving will be really, really helpful and it's an almost immediate mood booster, and also exercise is good for your immune system, so we certainly don't want to neglect our movement and do anything that could make us more susceptible to illness. In addition to that, use this time to do something you've always said you wanted to do. I personally have been saying for a while that I want to learn to knit, so I called a local knitting store before non-essential businesses were closed and I had them put together a beginners knitting kit for me. So I've been playing around with that. I'm definitely not a natural, but it's a skill that I'm learning and it's kind of fun, something to do and a great kind of mindful activity that stops me from worrying about all the things that are outside of my control and kind of forces me to focus on this creative task. But there's tons of things you can do like that, journaling, sending letters, go outside to take a quick walk, do some cooking or baking, expressing gratitude. There's really lots and lots of things we can be doing right now.

Julie: Now there's a lot of people who are home with their children who aren't usually home with children. If you work a full-time job and your kids are at school, all of a sudden you're all in the house together, which of course can be very stressful, but it's probably important while you're taking care of yourself to take care of them and it's hard to manage all of that. What do you recommend?

Dr. MC: I think for some of that, we have to really let go of our expectations. Parents aren't going to be able to work their full-time jobs, maintain the health and safety of everyone in their house, and become expert homeschooling teachers with the flip of a switch. People really need to be patient with themselves, kind to themselves and others. I think this is where boundaries can really play a key part in how you function. My husband and I sat down one of the first days of quarantine, and we were like, "okay we need a routine." Nothing too crazy, but we kind of chunked the times of what we were going to do, while still building in time for us to eat lunch together, which is nice as that's not something we normally get to do during the week and times to kind of check-in on each other and make sure we're okay and things are going okay while we're still getting our work done. I think it's really important for people to set those boundaries. I also think people need to, along with embracing what is happening and letting go of the expectations, their mindset is really going to play a key factor in this. If you are constantly

thinking how you're stuck at home, you're stuck at home; you're not stuck at home...you're safe at home. There's a difference in how we talk to ourselves and how we think about things that really impacts kind of our well-being and how we feel. So if you think more that you're safe at home, that's a very different mindset, and that almost makes you feel almost immediately better to think along those lines than to think that you're stuck at home. Same with social distancing, you're not social distancing, you're physical distancing. You can still get creative; you can still connect with people as long as you do it safely and in non-traditional ways or ways we're not necessarily used to by using platforms like Zoom and FaceTime and Google Hangouts. I've been gaming with my friends, I've been talking on the phone with loved ones, and although I haven't physically seen these people and I miss them dearly, changing that mindset of what this means from kind of a negative to a more positive growth mindset perspective is really helpful. You know, you're in isolation, and you're in quarantine, no, you're protecting your health and the health of all the other people that we love and if you're not acting out of a place of fear, but acting out of a place of love, just those simple mindset switches, I think will really help people in calming their anxiety.

Julie: I find sleep is very difficult.

Dr. MC: Sleep is really, really important, and I've been hearing a lot of people on Facebook in my groups and whatnot talking about having sleep issues. I think right now, if people are prone to anxiety and are having sleep issues and they have the means, I would highly suggest a [weighted blanket](#). I finally caved and purchased one a couple of months ago, and it has been really, really helpful. What a weighted blanket really does is it actually lowers the cortisol levels in your body and really just calms you and helps distress you, and I find it for the most part although not perfect, I've managed to be able to stay on a pretty good sleep routine, and I do think that the weighted blanket is helping with that.

Julie: I think people's routines are askew, obviously look, you're trying to work at home, you've got kids, you're trying to deal with them, your binge-watching TV til all hours of the night because you can. Snacking, I find snacking is just at an all-time high, so everything is almost spiraling out of control a little bit, how do we take control?

Dr. MC: It is, and you're absolutely correct, and some of these things I recognized are very triggering for people, and home is not always a safe place, unfortunately. If that's something that people listening are experiencing, there are resources available to help, and I hope that they're able to reach out. I think sticking to a routine is really helpful. It's going to be very tempting; if you haven't already tp kind of slip into a pattern where you're not going to bed at a regular time, you're sleeping way too late, you're overeating, you're under-eating, you're using other substances to kind of ease the anxiety. Those things will ultimately catch up with you and it does not benefit our overall well-being, so that's why I think again it's really important to stick to a routine. Get up around the same time you normally would if you were going to work, try not to nap during the day if you can help it, try to go to bed at a reasonable time and maintain any kind of semblance of your previous routine and structure that you can. You know, I've been watching

people on social media and people talking to me about how triggering some of this can be and I'm actually recovering from disordered eating over the past several years, and so for some people this is really an experience that is testing kind of the recovery for all sorts of things, not just eating disorders. Because I've developed other tools over the years during my recovery, I am able to turn to those and haven't fallen back on old habits. So that's why I feel you know if people can do some gentle stretching, do some yoga, participate, there's lots and lots and lots of activities for people that are available now, that have never been available before that you can utilize your time and will definitely be more productive.

Julie: There's also exercise videos online. The weather is getting nicer. I mean you can go out for a walk, you can even go for a walk with a friend, just don't walk close to them.

Dr. MC: Absolutely, I think some people are misusing that just a tiny bit. Where I live, we are near a very popular lake. I have not gone, but I heard that people are kind of walking the lake in droves very close to one another. That's kind of defeating the purpose, but if you were just going to walk your neighborhood or sit out on your back porch. My husband and I pulled out some of our summer seasonal furniture because one of the days last week was kind of nice. So we sat out on the porch to drink our morning coffee. It was a great change of scenery; we got a little sunshine. I'm looking forward to more of that in the coming weeks, hopefully, if the weather cooperates with us.

Julie: As self-care is more difficult during stressful times, what is the end-all-be-all, one thing that you want to tell people to do when it comes to self-care?

Dr. MC: Breathe. Like I said, there's no rule book for this. Breathing is actually something that is so simple, we all do it, but we don't necessarily do it intentionally and do deep breathing, but if you just close your eyes gently, put your hands on your lap or one hand on your chest one hand on your belly, whatever is comfortable...just take some deep breaths, that is almost an immediate way to calm your system and feel more at ease. Just be kind to yourself and compassionate. This is hard for so many people, but we're really doing the best we can.

Julie: Thank you so much. Dr. Theresa Melito-Conners, she is known as Dr. MC. She has her "[Dr. MC's Self-Care Cabaret](#)," you can check out her website, which is [drmcselfcare.com](http://drmcselfcare.com). Thank you so much for giving us these great tips for managing life during COVID-19.

Dr. MC: Thank you, be well.