



## Kessler Foundation Podcast Transcript: Practical Tips to Help Survive the Pandemic as a Parent of a Child with Autism

Recorded March 31, 2020. [Listen to it here.](#)

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REGINA PETER: 00:05 Structure and consistency that really matter, and that routine is so important, and understanding the needs of children and then adding to that during this time, where there's more needs that do come up.

ANNOUNCER: 00:18 Welcome to this COVID-19 special edition podcast brought to you by Kessler Foundation. In this episode, Nicky Miller, our social media specialist, spoke with experts in autism, Drs. Helen Genova of Kessler Foundation and Regina Peter of the Newmark Schools, about autism and social isolation. For more information about our experts and resources mentioned in the podcast, please check out the program notes. Listen in as Drs. Genova and Peter discuss practical tips to help survive the pandemic as a parent of a child with autism.

NICKY MILLER: 00:57 Joining us today are Drs. Helen Genova and Regina Peter. Dr. Genova is the assistant director at the Center for Neuropsychology and Neuroscience Research at Kessler Foundation, and Dr. Peter is the director at Newmark Education, a special needs school in Scotch Plains, New Jersey. We are brought together today due to unfortunate circumstances regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we won't let this pandemic stop us from using technology to connect and share information to help others get through this challenging time. Today, we are talking about how the coronavirus outbreak has affected the autism community. Welcome, Dr. Genova and Dr. Peter. Thank you both for joining us today.

HELEN GENOVA: 01:35 Thanks for having us.

PETER: 01:37 Yes. We appreciate it.

MILLER: 01:38 So all of this happened so fast. Right? Within days, our country shut down, kids were forced out of their schools, and their daily routine drastically changed. They went from playing outside with their friends to social distancing. There are continuous changes manifesting itself in different ways. Dr. Genova, how does all of this affect a child with autism.

GENOVA: 01:57 That's a great question, Nicky. If you think about a child with autism, one of the things that they really, really want is routine. They want to have predictability in their lives, and they really have a very strong preference for things to be the same throughout their day. So if you think about a child with autism, they know that, in the morning, they're going to have breakfast. Then, a bus is going to come pick them up to go to school. Then, they're going to get to school. They're going to see their same teachers, their aide, perhaps, their friends. They're going to have their subjects occurring in the same schedule every day. Then, they're going to go home and relax with their family. So if that's their routine, that's what they're used to, that's what their preference is going to be. When you have something like this outbreak of coronavirus where, suddenly, schools have shut down, it just completely disrupts the child's schedule and the child's routine, so there is no bus anymore to come pick them up. The school that they went to is now closed. They don't get to see their favorite teacher. They don't get to be with their friends. And this can cause a lot of anxiety for a child with autism,



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much more than, I would say, a child who doesn't have autism. It really is going to affect their lives in a very negative way.

MILLER: 03:16

Dr. Genova, what about parents and family members of children with autism? How does this affect them, as well?

GENOVA: 03:22

Yeah. I mean, they're really going to be feeling a lot of anxiety, also. Parents who work for a living are going to now suddenly transition into a role of being the child's teacher, being the child's therapist or aide, having to get them through their school day, which once was the job of a team of people. Let's say a child with autism has an IEP, where they have therapists and teachers and perhaps an aide and in-school supports. Now, it's just them and their parent. It's just them and their mom or them and their dad, and the parent now is responsible for making sure the child is learning and again siblings, for example, can feel a lot of the anxiety and the stress of having a family member going through this significant disruption. So I would say probably the schooling, that is going to be something that is going to be really disruptive to the entire family unit.

MILLER: 04:22

Dr. Peter, I'm sure all of this has affected you and Newmark as well, how is Newmark handling this pandemic?

PETER: 04:30

Yeah, so as you said in the beginning, it was very quickly that all of this occurred. And the one thing we knew at Newmark is as we were watching the news and talking to our local health department, we realized that the one thing we had to do was truly keep the structure and routine the same as possible given that our kids wouldn't be having their instruction done in the school day. So as we created our plans, we utilized technology everyday so we are having live instruction with our students. One of our purposes was how do we remain connected to our kids during this time while provided instruction and while continuing to be the educators, although we're not physically with them.

MILLER: 05:20

It's amazing the things that technology can do today. How to see the world connecting through this resource, it's absolutely amazing. How are parents and students reacting to these changes in their learning?

PETER: 05:35

Well we adopted Microsoft teams, which is an online learning platform for us where we can deliver live instruction and we've been utilizing that since the school year. So the difference is that we were able to utilize all that for assignments and things in class, but your teacher was live with you at that time. So our transition to remote learning was-- the learning curve wasn't steep for our staff, for our students because we had already been using the technology. But as they got into waking up on March 16 and logging in to their first period class as opposed to taking the bus to their first period class, our students really were adept at navigating our teams. We set up team calls, the whole entire school, I mean school, I'm sorry. The whole entire class is on there and they can see each other in the video call. So the teacher then really manages the session. So technology has made it able to happen, able to make education happen during this time. It does not replace the teacher. What we've learned three weeks in is that that connection with our physical connection with our staff and our students is paramount but it's the best that we can do in order to keep everybody safe and healthy.



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- MILLER: 06:57 Dr. Genova, I would like your input on this. How would you say Newmark is handling this situation? Is this typical? Are many schools doing this for kids with Autism?
- GENOVA: 07:08 You know, I would say it's not typical. I think that the children that go to Newmark are really really fortunate to have this, all of these resources at their disposal. For example, to be able to see their teachers on a screen or to be able to connect with their classmates through this program that Newmark is using, I think it's really exceptional and I don't think that most schools are doing that. It's kind of sad. I feel that at this point everybody is sort of in survival mode. We all are just doing what we can to get through this which is effective but I think unfortunately what we don't want to have happen is we don't want to have children with Autism slip through the cracks and so for a parent who has a typical child without autism, if you upload an assignment, so you say, "Your math homework today is pages 112 through 113. Do the assignment and you're done." Most children can just do that. And the problem is that when you have a child with autism, they can't just do that. There is going to be anxiety; there's going to be behavioral issues. They may not have everything they need in the home to learn the way that's best for them. So I don't know that all schools are able to provide this amount of support to their students, but I think that they should strive to because we don't want to have kids with autism going through months without proper education or the education that they're entitled to.
- PETER: 08:55 If I could just touch on something Doctor Genova said prior to your-- I think the big thing there is that in order to teach something new at this time, that's very difficult, in terms of you've never utilized the technology, and then all of a sudden you have to be on a Teams meeting or a Google Hangout or a Zoom meeting. As a teacher and certainly as a student with autism, that's really hard to do because that's a significant change. And I think one of the things that we do at Newmark is we continually prepare our staff and our students for their life, and it was just fortunate for us that we have been preparing utilizing Teams along this year, more for life because that's how we know technology is going, how jobs are going, how colleges are going. It just happened that we had this pandemic in the middle of it. We certainly didn't plan for this, but all the other things we're doing for people's lives, this just fell into it. And they were prepared to be able to get on online, and I think that's the key here. Had they not been, had we just been starting it out because the pandemic happened, it would've been a much, much more difficult transition.
- MILLER: 10:10 Doctor Peter, to backtrack on what you're saying, you said you prepared your staff for this. Other than Teams, were there any other ways that you spent time preparing them?
- PETER: 10:20 Well, I think the one thing to prepare them is a change for them. So we have a staff that's going home, and this is a change for them as well. They all have their own children that they have to now be the parent at home educating as well, so it was a fine balance. I think for us, we're very upfront about what the situation is. We speak very factually about things. And what we do as a leadership team is we plan out how we really want them to deliver instruction. What they're experts at is delivering the instruction, so our job as their leadership team is to help them be able to do that. So everything we do here, all our support staff, even now, supports whatever they're doing on their remote learning instruction. Whether that be making copies, dropping

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books off kids' houses, making sure our tech team does remote sessions with students to help them make sure all their technology is working. We're going to do that so our teachers are able to deliver the instruction that they have planned for. And I think that brings down everybody's anxiety, knowing that there's someone out there to really help them.

MILLER: 11:29 Doctor Peter, have you gotten any feedback yet from all of this? Is it too early to tell how this is working for you?

PETER: 11:37 No, I think we've gotten really positive feedback from all our families and even our students. I know everybody misses school, but we've had is just some really good feedback on how students are doing. We have staff meetings two to three times a week on our own Teams calls with 70 people. And then we also touch base regularly with teachers, myself. I've gone into students live lessons. Our teachers invite us and we're into all our classes as well. And then usually about 10 minutes into the class, they see your initials and they're like, "Dr. Peter's in our class." It's very funny. But that's how we really do that to support that because it's just again, really important to keep the energy levels high for everybody and very easy to do that when you're face to face, a little more difficult to do that when you are behind a screen.

MILLER: 12:29 How is this filling the needs for a child who really focuses on one-on-one interaction? Does this help at all?

PETER: 12:36 Well, I think that we also provide that one-on-one interaction within the team's platform. So generally what a teacher's doing is really giving a group lesson but then there are breakout groups and they can provide individual one-on-one for students. I think it's far simpler to do when someone's in front of you physically. But this has to be a little more structured, a little more scheduled because you're really scheduling another meeting with them. So I think that we're fortunate to have technology that allows us to do this in a situation that's less than ideal, certainly.

MILLER: 13:15 After this gets played a lot of educators, paraprofessionals, teachers, administrators will probably be listening in. Can you give them some advice that they can implement to help kids with autism handle this situation better?

PETER: 13:29 Well, think it's really just-- the question is really about helping children with autism. So one of the things that we do at Newmark is we have a teacher-training center. And we have a video series that is a training series for teachers, any educator, certainly paraprofessionals as well to understand the needs of children with autism, children with mood disorders, children with anxiety and how that manifests in the classroom. I think that program that we offer and right now we are offering that program at a very, very reduced rate to all our school districts so that they are able to train their paraprofessionals while we're on this somewhat of a limited school day. So we're able to really do that. But I think one of the things to really let people know it's truly, in a situation like this, it's structure and consistency that really matter and that routine is so important and understanding the needs of children and then adding to that during this time where there's more needs that do come up.

MILLER: 14:32 Dr. Genova, is there anything you suggest to make this easier for parents? Any advice?

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GENOVA: 14:39

Yes. Absolutely. I mean, if you have a child with autism, I think the best thing that you can do right now in a world that is sort of temporarily unpredictable, is to make life for them as predictable as possible. So if you have access to a computer and a printer, one thing you can do is make a schedule for your child. So that when your child wakes up in the morning they know that after breakfast, "Okay. We're going to start at 8:30 or 9. And we are going to start with our math work. And we're going to do that for 40 minutes. And when that's done, you're going to put those books away and you're going to take out the next set of books." And I would just make this schedule as visual as possible, especially if you have a child who maybe has difficulty with reading. Maybe put some pictures on there to make it interesting for them, something that they know, for the rest of the day, they know exactly what is going to happen. Because I think when you introduce that predictability and routine and sameness, sort of the day is happening the same every single day, you're going to reduce a lot of the anxiety that kids with autism are feeling. Another thing and I think Dr. Peter would agree with me is that kids with autism it's really important that they are physically active. And I think when you have something like this where everybody's told to stay inside kids with autism are really going to suffer because they're going to be laying around potentially, playing games on their screens and watching TV, et cetera. But their bodies are really going to be craving physical activity, sensory input. A lot of kids with autism sort of crave sensory input to their limbs and to their muscles. So I would definitely recommend building in time every day for them to get physical exercise, whether it be a bike ride or a walk outside or have your child, in between subjects, do push-ups or jumping jacks. I don't even think they realize how much their bodies need that right now. But I think it's really important. And I know Newmark introduces a lot of physical activity into their day because of how important it is for kids with autism.

MILLER: 16:59

That's really interesting. Dr. Peter, would you like to touch on that?

PETER: 17:02

Yes. I think Dr. Genova brings up a great point. So we have kept to our school schedule. So when children have Phys. Ed. they have activities to do during that time. We still stay to the schedule. When we have lunch and recess break, they have lunch and recess break and our teachers are giving them brain breaks and having them do different activities. And one of the things we encourage students is to really be physical so a few people have asked me, "Oh, are there any other technology uses that we can do with our children?" And I say, "No. Let us just teach them via the technology. And then get them outside even if it's just walking outside your backdoor for some fresh air and walking around your property." That is the best thing that you can do. We want to pull them away from the screen, in actuality, as opposed to giving them more screen time. We feel like our day is enough screen time and it's exhausting, too, all at the same time. So any physical input that you can give is really what's definitely needed away from the screens.

MILLER: 18:06

I know all of this has probably caused people to become exhausted and full of anxiety. There are so many people experiencing high levels of anxiety right now. And that's probably a big problem in autism community. Am I right, Dr. Peter?

PETER: 18:22

So yes. I do believe that. I think the world is experiencing anxiety. So I think that if you're anxious to begin with and generally children with autism have anxiety as well, you're really adding to that right now because of the confines that we're putting

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everybody under. So I think with that, we at Newmark, we do a lot of mindfulness and we've been trained in mindful schools several years back. So when we start our classes each morning our teachers have the mindful moment bell and we have a mindful moment before we begin our day. We use a mindful moment before we begin every staff meeting really to get ourselves grounded, to be present and to be focused on what we're about to discuss.

MILLER: 19:11

What is mindfulness? Can you tell me a little about that?

PETER: 19:14

Well, I probably can't give you the textbook definition but what I can tell you is and how we define it for our students is to-- and mindfulness has been around for thousands of years. It is nothing new but I think it's much more mainstream now because of technology because there's so much stimulation to our day with all the things that are competing for our attention. And I think for us as a school at Newmark, when we adopted the mindful school initiative. It was really to give our students the opportunity to train themselves to be in the moment to think about what's in the moment. So if you're someone with anxiety, you're never thinking about what's present, you are thinking about the future, and you're thinking about worrying, and you're separating on different things that you think might happen. And we're just asking you to use your breath, and pause and take a moment and be present to whatever you're doing. So all those other thoughts don't come rushing in. So for us, it's just really about teaching our children how to breathe, teaching our children how to be present in the moment, and any thoughts that they have to go in one ear and out the other and to be still. And you can imagine how difficult that really can be and just teaching someone to be still. So we've gotten some tremendous feedback from our students with the mindful on this program. We have students now that will tell their counselor on the phone, "I know I'm going to my room and I'm doing all my breathing exercises. Or I'm making sure I'm grounded. Or I'm making sure that I close my eyes and think really good positive thoughts." So it is really helping them to be present to what they're doing as opposed to anywhere else.

MILLER: 21:07

What are some behavioral changes that parents should look out for to help their child during this time?

PETER: 21:14

I think this time is hopefully the only time in history that we experienced this. Certainly, it has been for our generations. And with it, it is really if they're regressing in terms of their emotionally withdrawing. So our goal truly is we're using instructional learning to keep our kids engaged so that they're connected to another human being. And I think for our parents, and we've reached out to many of them. Along this time is that yes, this is difficult for everybody, not just a child with special needs. It's difficult for families when they can't see their loved ones. It's difficult if mom or dad has lost their job because of this, I mean, so there's lots of additional stressors here that fall on to the family unit. And I think for us, it's really looking at if you see your child withdrawing, or becoming depressed, that's the time to really get connected outside now new mark, certainly, we provide counseling to all our students. But in all the counties of New Jersey, they have hotlines that parents can call or students can call to really talk to a certified counselor and discuss what they're going through. So I think the state of New Jersey has done a tremendous job of

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understanding and knowing that the mental health needs of children as well as adults, do you really need to be addressed during this time.

- MILLER: 22:39 Are there any and this question goes for both of you? Are there any other ways that parents can prevent some of these behaviors?
- GENOVA: 22:46 I mean, I would love to reiterate what Dr. Peter said and to say when you're socially when you're told to stay home, you may be tempted to, for example, cancel appointments with your doctor, with your therapist, etc. But if you're feeling anxiety, in this day and age, there's really no reason to not connect with a therapist. Therapists are now using all sorts of applications that are safe and secure, to connect with their patients. So I think that's really important for the children, children with autism for their parents, who maybe are feeling anxiety or overwhelmed and having to be everything to their children, their teacher their everything. So to have to be able to contact your therapist and see them face to face, but maybe it's over a screen is really important and I don't think that people should be shying away from those activities or canceling them right now. I think now they're needed more than ever.
- MILLER: 23:48 Dr. Genova, you mentioned technology in connecting with a therapist. What are some other ways that we can use technology to find resources and stay connected?
- GENOVA: 23:57 Well, definitely, there's a lot of applications - I know I've been searching for them myself - to connect to people socially online. So, for example, my uncle it was his birthday on Friday night. So we scheduled a group FaceTime call, and we all called him and we sang happy birthday to him. And then right afterwards, we had a scheduled online game night. So myself and several of my friends and my brother, we all logged into a system and we all played an online game. So I think those sorts of activities kind of break up the monotony of the day. And they're also great if you can arrange them for your children - who maybe are missing their friends right now - to be able to do something that sort of connects them in a way without being physically near them.
- MILLER: 24:48 That's so unique and fun. An online game night.
- GENOVA: 24:51 Yeah, totally. It was a lot of fun. And it was nice to see all my friends that I haven't seen in weeks. That was nice.
- MILLER: 24:58 For individuals who are becoming mentally drained from connecting to social media, are there any other resources that people can tap into that they can step away from that screen from social media and maybe be immersed in something else?
- PETER: 25:14 When we use the word resources, so many times we think of technology, right? Because everything is right at your fingertips with that. And I think this happens for neighborhoods and communities. At least in my neighborhood, I have never seen so many people outside walking. All practicing social distancing. Making sure we're on different opposite sides of the street. But I do think this is the time. And we do have-- our weather is reasonable right now to get outside, to ride your bike, to kick your soccer ball with a friend even as long as you're 6 to 8, 10 feet apart, and to experience the outside of nature as while as you're practicing social distancing. I think those are the types of things that we should really be looking at. Simple things just like reading a book that is not online. Playing a board game with your family that again is not

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electronic. I think there's so many things that you can do that are not electronic. We're just not used to doing them.

GENOVA: 26:18

It's true. And I think in terms of social media, I find it to be both a blessing and a curse. And I think in times like this, to actually restrict the amount of time you spend on social media especially if you have anxiety-- I mean I actually just stopped checking Facebook because I found that there was nothing but bad news and panic. Who couldn't find toilet paper? Who was hoarding all the Lysol? And it made me sort of on high alert all the time where it was just, "What else do I need to worry about? What else do I need to worry about?" And speaking of mindfulness, to actually put down the phone and say, "Right now, everything's fine. We have plenty of toilet paper. There's not any reason to run out and to panic." And to just sit there and say, "You know what? Right now, everything's okay." And like Dr. [Pedro?] said, to go outside and just sit there and listen to the sounds of nature, and to enjoy your family in this moment, and not to worry about, "What's tomorrow going to bring? What's going to happen in three weeks? Is that party going to have to be canceled?" Forget it. Some things in life you don't have control over, and you probably shouldn't attempt to have control over. Just be present in the moment and just try to disconnect from social media if you can.

MILLER: 27:46

Dr. Genova, I actually thought about that question because you and I had talked earlier in the week and you mentioned how you were so drained from social media and I was drained, too and I was-- I felt so connected to you and I'm sure that other people could learn from some of the tips that you just gave because I was so drained from logging in to the constant [inaudible] and seeing people going crazy over toilet paper or the constant talking about COVID-19 that can get really draining and I love that you shared some of those tips.

GENOVA: 28:16

Absolutely. I think you just need-- I mean I've been sort of going on once a day and checking the news and saying, "Okay is there anything I need to know," and I give myself a limit of 10 minutes and anything more than that, it's not helpful. If the information you're seeking isn't going to be helpful to you, then there's no reason to continue to seek it.

MILLER: 28:35

Dr. Genova, now you recently worked on a paper that was published, congratulations by the way.

GENOVA: 28:41

Oh, thank you.

MILLER: 28:42

Could you tell us a little bit about that?

GENOVA: 28:44

It is actually a paper, it's very relevant to this conversation, on the effects or the effectiveness of mindfulness on children with autism and it was done with the Newmark School, we performed the research there. Dr. Peter and I were discussing different things that we could collaborate on and this just sort of came up as an opportunity given both of our interests in the topic. So what we did was we studied children with autism before and after the mindfulness program that was done at the Newmark School. And we didn't just study children, we actually studied teachers as well to see if the mindfulness program would benefit them. And so we found that it did. We found that everybody loved the program. It seemed that it was very enjoyable. The kids really took to it. They found that it really improved things in their



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life and then we specifically-- the paper that's going to be published is how mindfulness helped them with their what's called executive functioning. So executive functioning is just a fancy term [to?] mean all of the mental skills associated with making decisions, making the right decisions, stopping yourself from making a bad decision or the wrong decision. So you might have a child with autism who's very impulsive and just sort of they want to do something so they just do it whereas mindfulness kind of gave them a moment to, as Dr. Peter said, just breathe, be still, not react emotionally to everything and we found that on laboratory tests it actually did help them make those better decisions and to inhibit or stop making poor decisions. So it was really interesting and it's something that I think is really very helpful, not just for kids with autism, but their educators and then for parents as well.

MILLER: 30:44

Dr. Peter, tell us a little bit about the mindfulness program in your school?

PETER: 30:47

Oh, of course. I do think that it is-- we've done it again, this is our third year in the program and how we handle that know is we use our mindful moment each morning before we start our school day, every classroom does that. We also utilize that before a test, before an exam, before something that might be stress-producing. We've had our students in the National GeoBee and the National Health Bee and, we again, when we're in those kinds of competitions, we also utilize that. So wherever we know we need to really bring kids to the present moment, we really utilize that technique and we do that as well with our staff so we don't just do that with our kids, we make sure it encompasses our entire building. And I think what we've seen now, especially again another thing that we're utilizing that's a strategy we're utilizing for kids to really keep them calm during this I mean our councilors do remote calls with students, and they're generally done via Teams. And they do some mindfulness breathing techniques within their calls. So for us that skill that they've already learned, we can put into practice, and help them put into practice during a time like this, that certainly is more stressful. And I agree wholeheartedly with Dr. Genova, sometimes too much news is not good news, and we only can control what we can. And really right now, that's only what we do for ourselves during the day. Myself, I watch nothing. I watch no tv. I don't really go online at all when it comes to news. All I care about is when the governor of New Jersey's going to tell me I can reopen for my students because nothing else matters to me except for that and my immediate family, but they're with us, so I have that connection. But that is the only thing that truly matters to me is when he lets us know when that can happen because that affects our students, our families, our staff, and we try and just have a very calming presence and voice for all of those groups to know we're going to be back, it's just a matter of when.

MILLER: 32:58

Why is something like this important? Why is the research like this important?

GENOVA: 33:02

Well, I think that mindfulness is a tool that has definitely been shown to be effective in reducing anxiety. And given the fact that anxiety is so common, not just in the general population, but also in kids with autism, I think that it's a tool that once you learn how to do it, it's free. You don't have to go to someone and have them do it too you. It's not a medication. It's not something that has any side effects. It's literally just focusing your attention to the present moment, and to your breathing. So the wonderful thing about it is it's always available, it's completely free, and you have control over it. And I think right now more than ever, something like mindfulness or

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meditation or even praying if you're spiritual, it's something that you can do to calm your body down. Stop worrying about what's going to happen in the future. Stop worrying about what happened yesterday or three months ago. You're just right now, treating the moment as something that needs to be attended to, and sort of letting everything else go. And I think for kids with autism, for their parents, for their educators, right now, that skill, and to be able to use it is so, so important for reducing anxiety.

MILLER: 34:27

How are students responding to this?

PETER: 34:29

Oh, I think our students very much respond to this. I think some of them have to be reminded and prompted to utilize the skills, and I think some students do it naturally. Again, just another tool in their toolbelt to take out when they need it, and I think that goes for most of us. But that's really the end game is to give people what they need so in different situations, they get to pick what's going to work for them to bring them back to the present moment.

MILLER: 34:59

Is there a way that someone can access mindfulness programs? Are there any online resources people can tap into?

PETER: 35:06

Well, the Mindful Schools program is what Newmark has done, and you can tap into that, but I also think there's tremendous amount of apps - calm is one app that we utilize here at our school - that you can practice mindfulness. I mean, they have mindfulness apps for dogs [laughter]. So it is out there. Everywhere. And I use it for my own two dogs and it's quite calming. It's really amazing to watch because it's amazing how calm they are with the meditative music. But I think that particularly for schools, that's the program that we utilize, but I think there's many others out there as well.

GENOVA: 35:46

And I would say for individuals if you go on YouTube if you look for videos by Jon Kabat-Zinn, he was the one who developed mindfulness-based stress reduction, which is one of the techniques that's most effective for anxiety reduction. We can add that as a resource in connection with this podcast, but Jon Kabat-Zinn's videos are all on YouTube, and they're very helpful.

MILLER: 36:17

Both of you as women, as parents, or just as human beings, what do you want to share with other parents and families out there who feel as if they're losing their minds at the moment?

PETER: 36:28

I think from certainly an instructional and school point of view, but then as a holistic point of view of our world is just really just take a breath, be present in the moment. Take this opportunity. We may never get another opportunity like this again in our lifetime where we have had to, and we've been forced to slow down. So really spend that opportunity of really loving your loved ones, and really getting present into what they're doing because we don't really get that opportunity so much in the world because it's a pretty fast-paced world we live in, and it has come to a screeching halt. So I think for me personally, and the message we're sending to our families and to our staff is really cherish the time, as stressful as it is, but if you just turn it around into a positive, and cherish it, and say, "This too will pass, and this time it will never come again." And just seize the opportunity to whether learn something new, experience your family in a whole different light. I mean I think that's the-- I see the skills, our



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staff amazes me every day, but throw this pandemic in and they're lights out. They're just amazing, unbelievable people. The commitment they have to our students is beyond what I think even I knew. So I think really good things can come out of a stressful situation.

MILLER: 37:59 And we're all in this together, right? We're not alone. We're all doing this together.

GENOVA: 38:04 Absolutely. Absolutely. And I think Dr. Peter, she took the words right out of my mouth. And I was going to say to see this as a gift like she said, we're not going to have this opportunity again, hopefully, we won't, where you get to just sit at home in your pajamas and watch a movie with your kids, or bake a cake, or learn a new instrument, or whatever it is. We're not going to have this time to just disconnect from everything and to slow down and just to be with the people we love the most. So I think to see it as a gift is a really wonderful idea.

MILLER: 38:40 Thank you so much for joining us and for sharing all of the resources. Everything that you had to say was so helpful.

GENOVA: 38:46 Absolutely. Thank you for having us.

PETER: 38:47 All right. Thank you.

ANNOUNCER: 38:49 Tuned in to our podcast series lately? Join our listeners in 90 countries who enjoy learning about the work of Kessler Foundation. The new episodes our experts weigh in on the impact of COVID-19 on people living with disabilities, and they talk about how research that changes lives continues at Kessler Foundation. Listen on iTunes, Soundcloud, Spotify, or wherever you get your podcasts. For more information about Kessler Foundation, go to [kesslerfoundation.org](http://kesslerfoundation.org).