

Coronaschool 101

Amid sounds of shouts of relief at the announcement of cancelled exams; and despair at not being able to hang out with friends...Clare is looking at her cell phone and says out loud: *School is what!!? Cancelled for the year? But that's three more months!!*

Clare drew a deep breath and left the room quickly before she said or did anything she would regret. She knew that her children and husband depended on her for things to run smoothly at home. She had so many questions. *How would it be like to have everyone at home? She just found out that she will be working from home. What will it be like to have everyone home at once, together? School hours were normally her sanity time. Not that she ever relaxed, simultaneously working part-time and staying ahead of the family's needs. Taking care of shopping, appointments, cleaning, and laundry was already a lot. Now she knew she needed to be strong, to cover these things...somehow...while also homeschooling!?* Would the kids get along long enough to be in one space? *Doubtful!* How would she and Paul manage in one space all day while both are trying to work? *Recently, things seemed to get tense more easily between them. Usually everyone's activities outside the house made the little family time they had more pleasant.*

How will our friends manage? Some were out of a job, others stuck in a small apartment, and then there are the friends who are dealing with special needs kids. How were they all going to manage? Clare picks up 3-year-old Sophie and gives her a long hug.

Paul hesitated before dialing. He thought to himself: *How or what could he say to Clare? She was a strong lady and liked to do things her way. He knew the exterior 'put-together' Clare would be freaking out just about now. There was, after all, a limit to what a person can and should do. At some point, they do have to take care of themselves or they will burn out. Clare always said that he was "never there". Now she's going to complain because he's always there.* He was burnt out, putting all his energy into his promotion. It was all for his family, he thought. But he realized that putting work first hadn't really been *all* for his family and his family had suffered. *At least he had a job that he could continue working on from home during the pandemic. How could he make up for lost time with his family, and get anything done in their small home?*

Liam (17), as usual, disappeared to his room, earplugs blocking out the world and only letting in what he allowed. *How was he going to finish honours classes without much guidance and then graduate without exams? Would he really know what he was capable of before heading off to university? That was too scary to think about right now. Besides, teachers were still figuring things out, maybe it would be fine. Why worry today?*

Katie (13), meanwhile, was already on hangouts bemoaning with her friends. *How were they going to survive without seeing each other? She felt her social life was ending. No coach and basketball after school? No help in math...which always seemed more confusing after the teacher explained it....and everyone else seemed to get it?*

Then there's Nathan (9) who was off the wall all the time due to ADHD and not knowing what to do with himself. Abandoned as usual, he noticed how many minutes had passed since the announcement, what colour socks his brother was wearing, what ads were playing just before and after the news.....*why did he only notice what he was not supposed to and miss what everyone considers important? His family doesn't even seem to want him around. He only gets yelled at for everything he did wrong.* He tried really hard, but he couldn't act like everyone wanted him to. Now the thought of being stuck home all the time stressed him out. So, he did the only thing he knew how to do to get noticed: Annoy everyone.

6 weeks later...

The sound of the alarm found Clare already awake, her mind racing. She thought back to that first week of isolation as the longest week of her life. She tried to make a schedule the first week, but it was too hard to make everyone follow it. Everyone wanted to do their own thing. Clare finds them on their screens all the time. Things were calmer now...somewhat. But she's still exhausted. With everyone home, the house gets cluttered and dirty so fast, it's hard to keep up. The lesson plans, on their various electronic platforms, still daunted her but Nathan, in particular, had surprised her. He could sit and stay focused as long as she stayed with him. He seemed to thrive on that one-on-one attention. It was a juggling act to find that time though. She mentally organized her day, which clients she would meet with remotely, planning her 'zoom ready' look.

Paul has been very distant lately, ever since they had that fight over who should keep the kids quiet while the other is having a meeting. She wanted to ask him to speak to Liam about his gaming habits since she felt he'd have more impact, but perhaps he will think that she's dumping this on him. If Liam was worried about getting into that program at the university, he didn't show it. She was constantly overcome with guilt about her youngest child, her baby. She was chatty and outgoing but seemed to need a lot of attention these days. Well, they all did. Clare couldn't help but notice that Sophie was driving everyone crazy. They used to think she was so cute and sweet and now they're very impatient with her.

She woke Paul, who sat up and stretched. He looked at her suddenly and said:

I forgot to mention that last night when I walked past Katie's room, I heard crying.

Family Development



Clare was aghast. *What?! Did you go in to see her and ask her what was wrong?*

Paul looked sheepish. *Well, I figured it was either her latest math assignment or problems with her friends and I didn't feel up to handling either of them.*

He told Clare she could hit the showers first. He thought that a big concession. Then Sophie toddled into the room. He jumped up and gave her a cuddle.

Come on, little girl, let's get you dressed, wake everyone up and put the coffee on for mom.

The day unfolded with the usual combination of triumphs and tragedies. Clare was pleased she hadn't raised her voice once yet. Suddenly the doorbell startled them. Katie rushed to the door to see her friend drive off with an excited wave. Left behind was a plate of cookies and a 'special friend' note. Katie beamed. That small thoughtful act made her day!

That evening, Katie organized a trivia night. The boys served popcorn and juice and Sophie climbed on everyone, desperately wanting to be noticed. Everyone was delighted with the family trivia category. Clare and Paul were proud of Katie, surprised she'd pulled it off.

When Clare was getting ready for bed, she recalled with a pang that next weekend was her much planned and anticipated getaway with her girlfriends. She had so looked forward to it and felt resentful, angry even, but also sad. *And what about their family reunion at that gorgeous villa they had rented in the summer...would it even happen? Would they get their deposit back? Would the airlines give refunds? She wondered, yet again, when it would all end.*