

SHELBY AND QUINCY

WHAT IS SHELTER IN PLACE?



By Melissa Hines Helms

Illustrated by Stephanie Parcus

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Hi! I'm Shelby, and I'm 8 years old. Just like most other kids, I like to play with my friends—at the park, at recess, or at our houses. I also like to ride my bike, play soccer, and most especially, be with my dog, Quincy!

One day, my parents asked if they could talk with me about some virus called COVID-19.

“Shelby, we need to let you know that things will be different for a little while. School will be closed, your mom and I will be working from home, and we won't be going to games or parks for a bit,” Dad says. “They call it shelter-in-place.”

“Oh! Like the shelter place where we got Quincy from?” I ask.



“No,” Dad says. “It’s ‘social distancing’. That means staying at home for a while.”

“And when we do go out, like to the grocery store, or to walk Quincy, keeping a lot of space between us and other people. Pretend there is a bicycle between you and the other person, and keep that far away while passing by or talking to them,” Mom says.

“Waving hello instead of fist bumps, riding bikes and playing soccer with Mom or me instead of your friends, learning from your teacher online instead of in the classroom. Those kinds of things,” Dad adds.

I don’t like the sound of this at all. “But why?”

“There’s a virus that’s called COVID-19,” Mom says. “It gives a lot of people aches and fever—like when you got the flu last winter. Most people, especially kids, might not even have any symptoms, or might feel like they just have a little cold.”

“But some people, especially people Nana’s and Papa’s age, get very sick, and need to go to the hospital,” Dad says. “That’s why we can’t see them right now, and why we need to shelter-in-place.”

“So, if we do this stay at home thing, people won’t get sick?” I ask.

“That’s the goal,” Mom says. “But viruses are very small, and this one is pretty contagious—that means it’s easy to catch.”

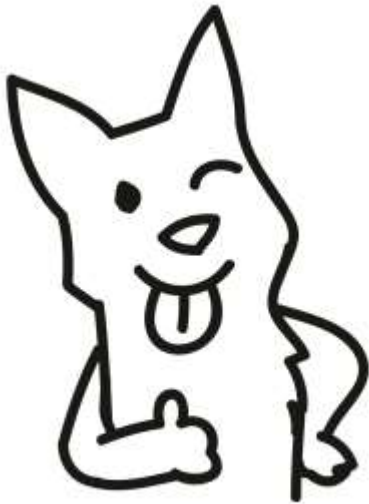
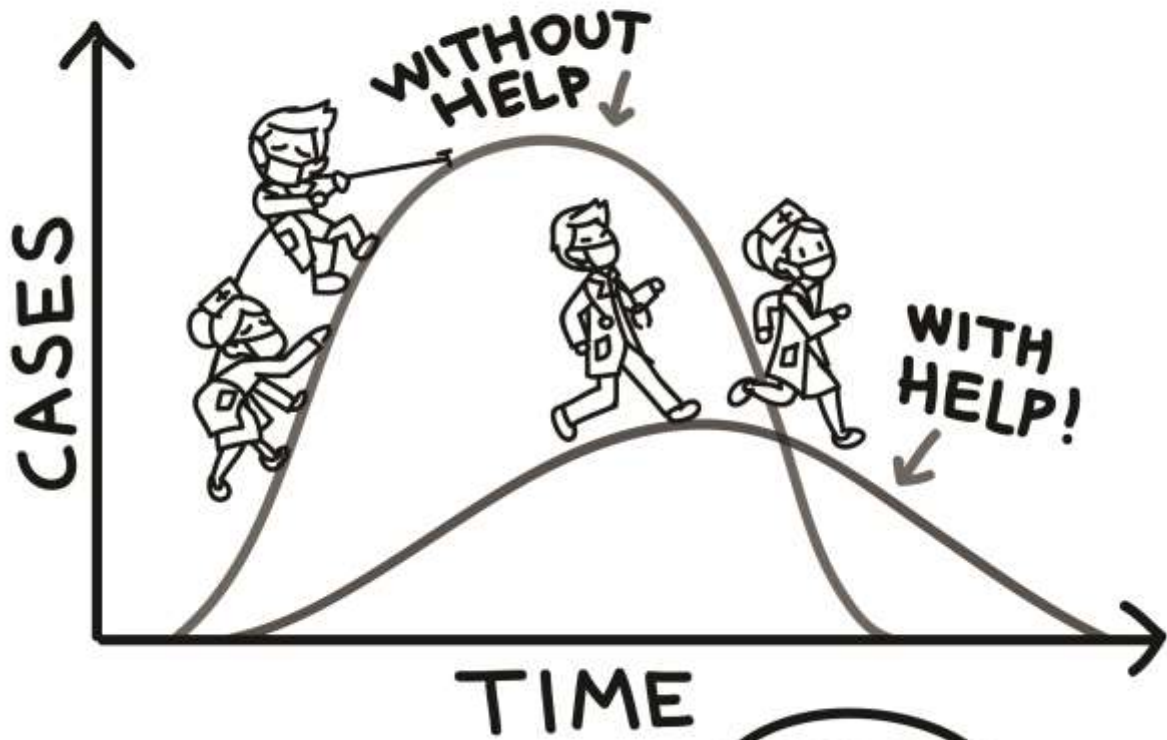
“So, a big part of shelter-in-place is meant to ‘flatten the curve,’ or spread out infections over time instead of lots of people getting sick all at once,” Dad says. “That gives doctors and nurses a chance to help more people who do get very sick.”

“Imagine if we all got the flu at the same time,” Mom says. “None of us would be well enough to take care of each other.”

“But if just Mom got the flu, we could take care of her,” I say to Dad.

“Yes, and then when I got better, if your Dad got the flu, we could take care of him.” Mom smiles.

HOSPITAL WORK



“Ohh-kayy.” I say. “But how long do we have to do it?”

“Until the risk of catching the virus are lower or go away,” Dad says. “It won’t be forever--scientists are working on a vaccine every day.”

“What’s a vaccine?” Quincy runs over and drops ball in my lap. I toss it for him, and he chases it into the kitchen.

“It’s to give you antibodies, which help fight the virus and keep you from getting sick if you do come into contact with it,” Mom smiles.

Quincy comes back and rubs up against my leg. He can tell I’m a little scared. I pet him behind his ears, and it makes me feel a little better.

“There are lots of things we can do to keep us healthy,” Dad gives my shoulder a little squeeze. “Get enough sleep, exercise, eat healthy foods.”

“Cough or sneeze into your elbow, or into a tissue that you throw away,” Mom says. “You may see people wearing masks or cloth over their mouths and noses to stop their sneezes and coughs from getting germs onto other people.”

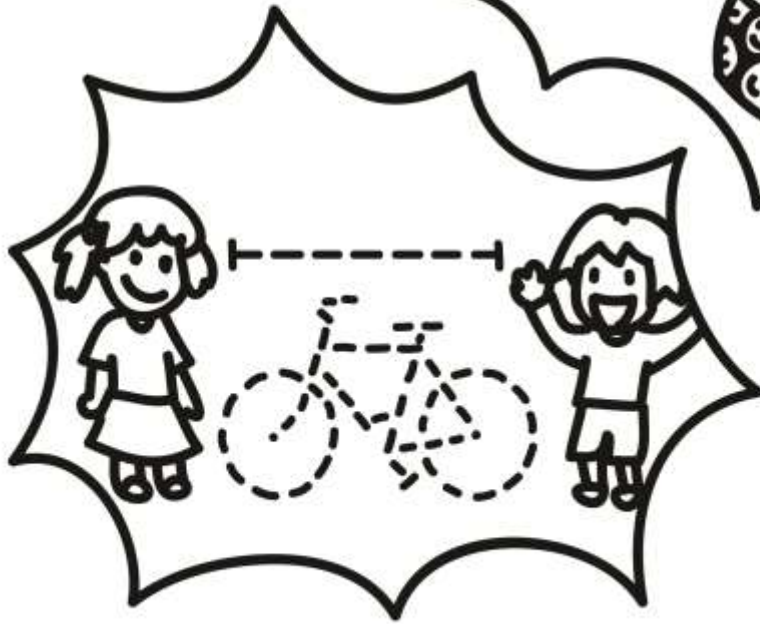
“Stay home more, avoid close contact with people you don’t live with, and wash your hands often,” Dad says. “Doctors believe most people get sick when the virus gets on their hands, and then the person touches their mouth, nose, or eyes.”

Quincy must remember the word “wash,” because he stretches up to start licking my face. I giggle and gently pick him up.

“Be sure to get the soap on your thumbs, the backs of your hands, and between your fingers, too,” Mom reminds. “Sing ‘Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star’ once slowly, or the ‘Happy Birthday’ song twice to make sure you are washing for at least 20 seconds.”

“What if I’m not near a sink?” I ask, stroking Quincy’s back.

“We have a little bottle of hand sanitizer for you to carry in your pocket.” Dad hands it to me. “Just like when washing your hands, make sure to spread it all over.”



“So, if we’re all stuck in the house together, what will we do?” I set Quincy down by my feet.

“We can go on walks and bike rides together—that would be fun for us to do even after you can start riding with your friends again,” Mom says. “Play with Quincy, practice soccer in the back yard. Play games, cards, make art and music together.”

“Can we have movie nights, and living room picnics?” I remember we made a big box into a pretend car, and had fun watching Toy Story 4 last year in the living room. It makes me smile.

“Of course! And we can read books, make forts, fly kites, do puzzles and projects. Learn something new, like Spanish, or cooking. Finally get around to cleaning our rooms,” Dad winks at Mom.

Mom says, “THAT would be nice,” and smiles at dad and me.

Quincy paws at my leg, and I pick him up again.

“We can still help other people, even though we can’t do most of it in person,” Dad says. “Mom or I will still go to the pet store on our days to clean the cat adoption shelter.”

“Can we check in on Mrs. Avery next door?” I ask. “If her grandkids can’t come over, she might get lonely.”

“That’s a great idea,” Mom says. “I have her phone number—we can call her today. And you can help me make cloth masks to donate to nursing homes and other places that need them.”

“But, I don’t know how to sew,” I say, frowning.

“That’s all right, you can cut out the patterns and the strings for me to sew,” Dad says.

“And I can pack them up to send them out,” Mom adds.

“Now, things might get a little tense, with us being together so much. We all need to keep an eye on how we are feeling—we can practice our three deep breaths if we start getting angry, ask for hugs if we start feeling sad, and talk to each other if we start feeling anxious.” Dad says.

“Going on a jog, yelling into a pillow, or doing jumping jacks really helps me cool down,” Mom says.

“Sometimes I sneak in some extra Quincy snuggles if I’m feeling down,” I say.

“Absolutely,” Dad says as he pats Quincy’s head.

I can feel my lower lip start to tremble. I hug Quincy closer. “And school? My friends?”

“We can call and video chat with family, and you can do the same with your friends,” Mom puts her hand on mine. “We can play games and make up video scavenger hunts to do with them.”

“And arrange online parties with your friends, too,” Dad says. “It will be different, but we can find lots of ways to have fun and stay connected. Your teacher gave us times that she and your classmates will be online, so you can still learn together.”

“Everyone needs to do their part to stay healthy,” Mom grabs the paper and pencil on the table. “Let’s start a list of all the fun things we can do.”

I take a deep breath, and feel my chest loosen up as I start sharing some of my own ideas.



RESOURCES

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/talking-with-children.html>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/in-depth/kids-covid-19/art-20482508>

<https://www.timeforkids.com/g56/flattening-the-curve-2/>

<https://www.510families.com/where-to-play-outside-with-kids-during-shelter-in-place/>

<https://nymag.com/strategist/2020/03/things-to-do-with-kids-while-quarantined.html>

<https://austin.kidsoutandabout.com/content/master-guide-covid-19-online-activities-kids-teens-families-and-adults>

<https://www.idealists.org/en/careers/help-others-coronavirus> (ways to volunteer during COVID-19)

About the Author:

Melissa Hines Helms is a Nationally Certified School Psychologist who has been working with children for over 20 years. She currently lives in Austin, Texas with her husband, daughter, and two cats. She practices mindfulness and meditation, gardening, and enjoys singing and dancing with her family. She has been an active volunteer for many organizations, including as a fellow with the Young Author Project through the Deep Center in Savannah, GA, helping develop the creative writing of middle-school students through eleven-week workshops.

She is writing a series of middle-grade fantasy books about the adventures of fairy twins named Leah and Rhea.

https://www.amazon.com/Leah-Rhea-Melissa-Hines-Helms/dp/0996989315/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=leah+%26+rhea&qid=1587997272&sr=8-1

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About the Illustrator:

Stephanie Parcus loves to create beautiful things. She is constantly inspired by the adventures of her dog and two cats. She loves to draw animals above all else, and is a traveler with a backpack full of colors.