

How to hang in there before school starts

THE MOM SCENE

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If I could write this face-down, it would be symbolic. That's because I am so far beyond cutesy stories about ways to have a magical summer and plan special activities for your kids.

That's not what this column is — this is me, digging down deep, throwing you a couple of random life preservers in the hopes that we'll all get through the next four-ish weeks.

I am exhausted. Truly. We are in parental damage control mode, where it's all about just surviving the next month and getting to the finish line that is Sept. 8 — the first day of school.

It's been almost five months straight of temporary layoffs and then getting rehired (both me and my husband rode that super fun roller coaster, luckily not at the same time), struggling to work from home full-time without any childcare, financial worries, bored and depressed children, agoraphobia, oh, and crippling anxiety about the virus that's killing hundreds of thousands of people.

Forgive me if I'm not in the mood to invent a five-minute craft or round up my top 10 places to go for family fun. But I do have some ideas for you, I swear — a few suggestions for getting through these last long, nervous weeks until school starts.

Try to remember pre-COVID activities in case they're open again

In our "before" life, we used



Heather and her family went mud-sliding on the banks of the Shubenacadie River with Out of Bounds Adventure Creations. **SAFFRON MORRIZ PHOTOGRAPHY**

to do things like go to the movies, play mini-golf and go bowling — and then those things were off the table for so long that we'd basically forgotten they existed.

Our local movie theatre is still closed, but we recently had a bit of good luck when a mini-golf place reopened. (They could have opened earlier but their turf was stuck across the border because, well, COVID.)

We hadn't heard a peep about the local bowling alley reopening so we figured it was still closed, but my husband called last week on his day off and they were open! Hallelujah. He took our kids and their buddy bowling, and it gave me and my neighbour a blessed two hours of peace and quiet to work. I was actually sorry I couldn't go, though — bowling, how I've missed you!

Our local Clay Cafe is also open again, and we spent a wonderful afternoon there — painting pottery and having a few treats. It was blissfully normal and we enjoyed it very much. So, seriously, check out the places you used to go before COVID. They might be open for business again, and they'd love to see you.

TURN LEFTOVERS INTO A 'COOKING' COMPETITION

This sounds mega creative but it's actually just an excellent hack for exhausted parents. I hate cooking at the best of times and always hate it more in the summer, but this summer has been on another level. I am so sick of everything (and everyone) and the thought of making a grocery list makes me want to cry.

But the kids and I watched

Season 2 of Top Chef Junior recently — hey, there's another idea! Binge-watch a show together — and loved seeing these little 10 to 13-year-olds create amazing dishes with whatever ingredients they were provided.

So on one of zillion nights when I had no freaking idea what to make for dinner, I grabbed random leftovers, cooked some pasta and stuck everything on the table, buffet-style. The kids and their buddy were challenged to make their own meal in two minutes, and they LOVED it. Leftovers had never been so appealing because they were chefs, you see.

'SPEND OUT' FOR A COUPLE OF FUN EXPERIENCES

I have this theory that parents who aren't working this summer are able to spend every day doing fun stuff with the kids, so those things don't usually need to cost much. Beach, park, playground, picnic, camping, cottages, etc. They post pictures on Facebook, I feel sad and guilty, and the cycle continues.

For households like ours, where both parents are working a lot and don't have camp/childcare right now, there's a lot of guilt that our kids are mostly stuck here, bored and lonely. That means that when we can actually be off on the same day and do something fun as a family, our guilt compels us to go all out. *cash register chimes*

Pre-COVID, my guilt-induced "fun experiences" were almost always going to see a play or concert with the kids. I had to come up with new ideas this summer, though, so I jumped on a couple of adventurous activities that allowed for social distancing.

I booked us on a mud-slid-

ing tour with Out of Bounds Adventure Creations, since it's something we'd never done before, and we had an absolute blast. If you've never been mud-sliding, imagine a slip'n'slide that's just a steep hill made completely of squishy, soft mud — with a river at the bottom. Some people were surprised I was into that, since I'm an indoorsy girl, but I think I loved it more than anyone.

A couple of weeks later, I booked us on a Sea-Doo tour with Harbour Watercraft Tours & Adventures. We zipped all over Halifax Harbour, me and our daughter on one Sea-Doo and my husband and our son on the other. It was probably something we'd never have done, pre-COVID — because the kids would have been in day camp and we would have had our summer vacation to Ontario — but I'm so glad I heard about it and signed us up.

The truth is that, no, our family is not going to look back fondly on this COVID spring/summer. Other families will, and that's great for them. They'll remember all of the extra time they got to spend together and the extra fun things they had the time to do.

For our family, the last almost-five months have been rough. They've been boring, frustrating, tiring, stressful, depressing, lonely, dreary and anxious. But we're getting through it — together — and trying, wearily, to have a bit of fun when we can.

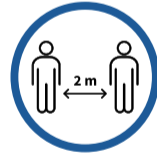
Heather Laura Clarke is a freelance journalist who married her high school sweetheart. They moved from the city to the country, where they spend their days making messes and memories with their eight-year-old son and six-year-old daughter.

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The purpose of the meeting is for members to vote on Church closure, and a merger with the Gaspereau Baptist Church.

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