

## Coping with Covid-19 in 2020

In February 2020 I turned 40 and the celebrations included a short trip to New York with my husband Mike. On the plane and around the city we kept seeing people wearing facemasks and had a little laugh about the Americans being so dramatic. Little did we know that within a few weeks we would be in the same position ourselves!

Mike works away for long stretches and he returned to work at the end of February, leaving me in Brighton-le-Sands with our two boys, Charlie who was nearly 11 and George aged 8. I work part time at Santander and am used to running the house, looking after the boys, taking them to their out-of-school activities and socialising when I can, with some help from my mum, my brother and my mum-in-law.

Within a couple of weeks it became clear at work and at St Nicholas' School that things were about to change. I have an underlying health problem and on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> March I was told to stay at home and shield for at least 12 weeks. I couldn't believe it and felt quite emotional because reality had hit home. Here I was, alone in the house and fully responsible for our sons – who would look after them if I became really sick? I admit that I did panic a bit but I like to be organised! While the boys were in school that week I dashed into town and bought Charlie's birthday presents (his big day is 11<sup>th</sup> April) in case I didn't get another chance, some craft materials and a big jigsaw puzzle, which is a weird thing to buy because we don't even like doing puzzles!! But it seemed like a good idea at the time! I also arranged to have some groceries delivered and took whatever slots I could for the next few weeks. By Friday 20<sup>th</sup> March school was closing and lockdown had begun in earnest.

My OCD really kicked in then and I developed a plan of action. Mrs Woods and her staff were fantastic and everything the boys needed to do their school work was provided in a folder and on line. I organised the day as follows:-

	<b>Charlie and George</b>	<b>Mum</b>
<b>8.30</b>	Breakfast, wash and get dressed	Breakfast, wash and get dressed Wash up and tidy round
<b>10.00</b>	Exercise with Joe Wicks	Watch Joe Wicks!
<b>10.30</b>	School work	Help the boys when needed Make lunch
<b>12.00</b>	Run or cycle twice round the block, aiming to beat personal best!	Keep an eye on the boys from the front garden while shielding!
<b>12.30</b>	Lunch	Lunch
<b>1.15</b>	Play board games, draw, craft activities, play Lego etc	Play board games with the boys, craft activities
<b>3.00</b>	Snack, read	Watch TV, social media
<b>4.00</b>	Screen time	Housework, prepare evening meal
<b>5.00</b>	Dinner	Dinner
<b>5.30</b>	Football skills in the garden	Wash up, tidy round
<b>7.00</b>	Shower and PJs, screen time	Chill in our PJs
<b>9.00</b>	Bedtime	Me Time!

Amazingly we have kept to this routine almost all the time. In fact during the Easter and Whit breaks we all really missed the school work! I think that having a structure has helped us through the uncertainty as I felt in control of that part of my life at least! I have to say that the boys have amazed me, not just because they accepted the 'rules' and knuckled down to their work (I couldn't believe how independent they were!) but because **most** of the time they have been amicable with each other and have done as they've been told without moaning or bickering.

Mike was able to keep in contact all the time (thank goodness for technology!) and decided that he wouldn't come home in April as planned, but opted to stay on the ship for another trip. We were all upset but we had to think about our finances rather than being sentimental. Better to be safe and solvent. (He finally arrived home on 23<sup>rd</sup> June and was welcomed home literally with open arms.)

There were some other disappointments of course – Charlie's birthday celebration was very low key with a drive-by from his school friends, followed by take away pizza and cake with George and me.

Charlie and Mike were due to go to Barcelona with the football team, Charlie's school holiday was cancelled, there was no Summer Fair or Sports Day. All the traditional Y6 leavers' events such as the service in the cathedral, the play, the leavers' service in school were not going to happen. And there was no football to watch on TV!

But the weather was kind to us and the boys enjoyed lots of relaxation playing in the paddling pool and having water fights. As time went on we ventured out a bit more to walk past Granny and Grandad's house a few times and to drop Easter eggs and birthday presents at Cousin Iris and James' house.

As things are gradually starting to open again, looking back I'm actually quite proud of myself for managing everything on my own. We'd planned for the builders to start on a loft conversion in July, but they had two cancellations and asked if they could start our work in May instead. Mike and I decided to go ahead and most of the work was done from the outside until the last two weeks when they put the staircase in. The men were very aware of social distancing so it all felt safe; I set up a drinks station in the shed for them and sterilised the cups every night. One of the neighbours even called with a bunch of flowers for me because she thought I'd been a star! I have to say the scaffolding was a real eye sore, not to mention the portable toilet in the front garden!



On reflection the worst bit for me was at the beginning when it hit home how serious things were. Every time the news and the briefings came on TV it was so scary and like nothing I'd ever experienced before. I was constantly washing my hands and squirting anti bac on them. I felt anxious and tearful for a good few days especially as Mike was away. I did get used to it all after a week or two though and started to worry about more important things such as my roots showing, doing my own nails and salvaging a social life through WhatsApp and Instagram!

But the best bit has to be having the chance to spend so much time with Charlie and George. We've had some great conversations, lots of fun together and loads of laughs. I haven't had to go dashing out to work, fit the housework in and rush round with them to their training, football matches and friends' birthday parties. We actually ended up quite self-sufficient and antisocial in our little bubble. I feel very privileged to be Mummy to our two gorgeous boys.

**Annemarie Utley**

