

Gabi Says, "I'm Confused!"

No School, No Friends!

A Story about Social Distancing



By Amy Bamforth

Illustrations by Janet Lane

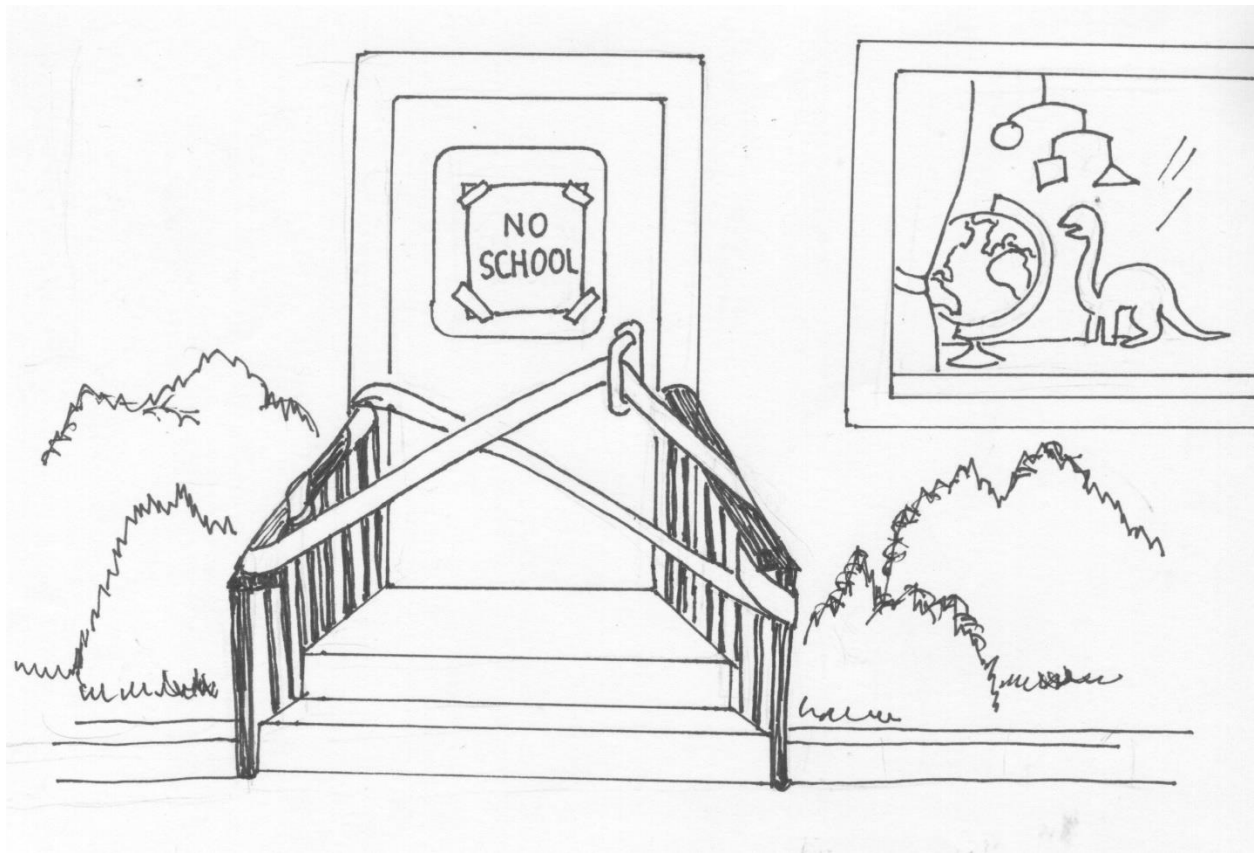
With thanks to the Children's Commonwealth Fund

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Gabi feels so confused! She usually goes to school when her Mama goes to work. But last week, her school closed down with no warning. Now she is home and cannot see her school friends or even go to the playground. She does not know what to expect when she wakes up.



Teachers and her Mama said that there is no choice, that all the schools are closing because of a new virus. Staying home from school is supposed to help people stay healthy.

When Gabi's friends get sick, they usually stay home for a couple of days. This is SO different. No one is sick at school, but they still closed it. Every day, her Mama says, "Today is a home day. I'm not sure yet when school will be open again."



Gabi does not like that! Big feelings can happen when you don't know what to expect. Her school is closed. She wants to see her friends. Gabi feels frustrated and mad. She misses her teachers, friends and the classroom.



Gabi's Mama has to go to work even though school is closed. Gabi goes to her Auntie Ana's house when Mama goes to work. There are toys there, but not school toys. Her cousin Henry is there, but not her school friends. That makes Gabi sad and mad! She wants to play in the house corner and run on the playground!



Gabi asks Auntie Ana if they can go to the park. Auntie Ana says "No". They cannot go to the playground in the park because they need to stay in the apartment to stay healthy. She says the virus might be at the playground so the children cannot play there. She heard that doctors say we need to practice social distancing- that is really confusing! Auntie says it means staying away from other people-even people we like-so we do not catch the virus.



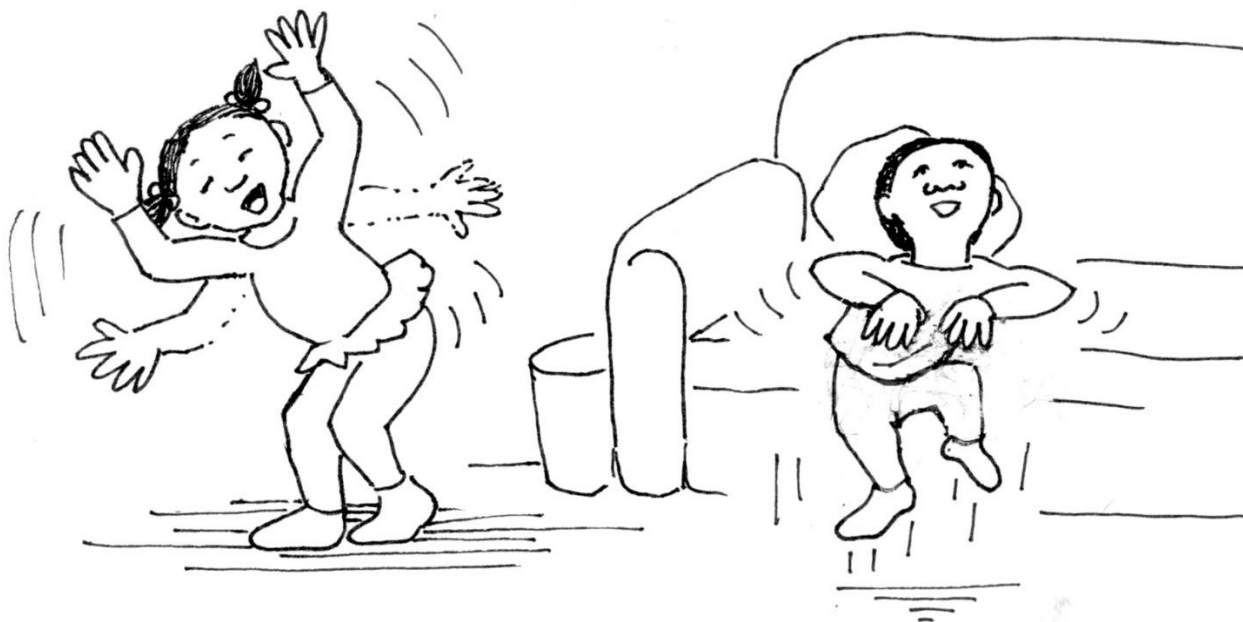
Ana brings out some paints and paper. Gabi paints a yellow sun, and then makes a big dark cloud cover it up. Auntie Ana asks about her picture and Gabi says, "It's my mad feelings."

Auntie Ana says, "What a great way to share them! It must be hard to miss your school! Lots of people are upset and confused right now. It is hard to know what to expect with the new virus that we are hearing about."



Gabi is surprised. She didn't know that Auntie Ana would understand about missing school. She didn't know that her auntie understood about the virus and changes and not knowing what to expect.

Auntie Ana says, "I know some things we can do to help us with feeling confused and upset. Would you like to try them?"



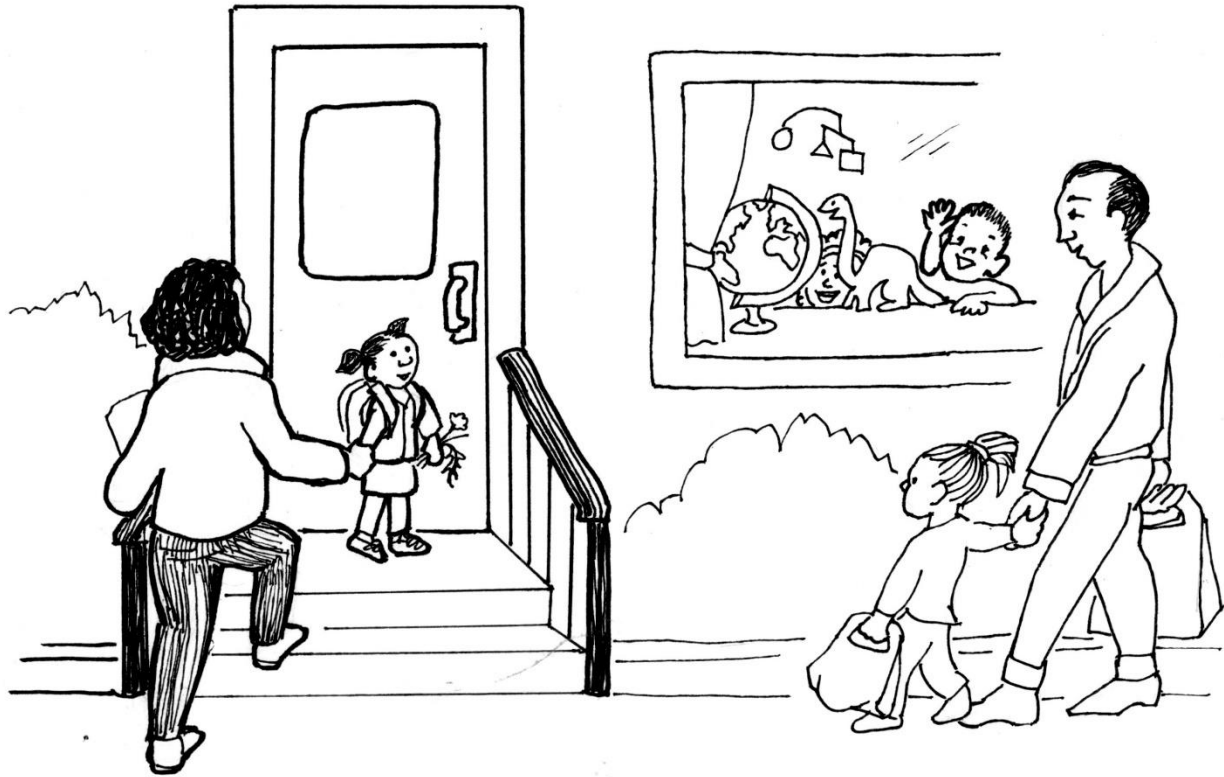
Henry says, "Yes," and Gabi nods too. Auntie says, "First, let's have a dance party!" She puts on some music and they dance. After a few minutes she stops the music and says, "OK, now I have a challenge! When the music goes on, you dance. When the music stops, your body has to stop and freeze. Ready?"



Gabi and Henry say, "Yes" and smile. The music starts and they dance and laugh. Suddenly the music stops! They stop and look at each other. Seeing the silly poses makes them smile. Smiling feels good.



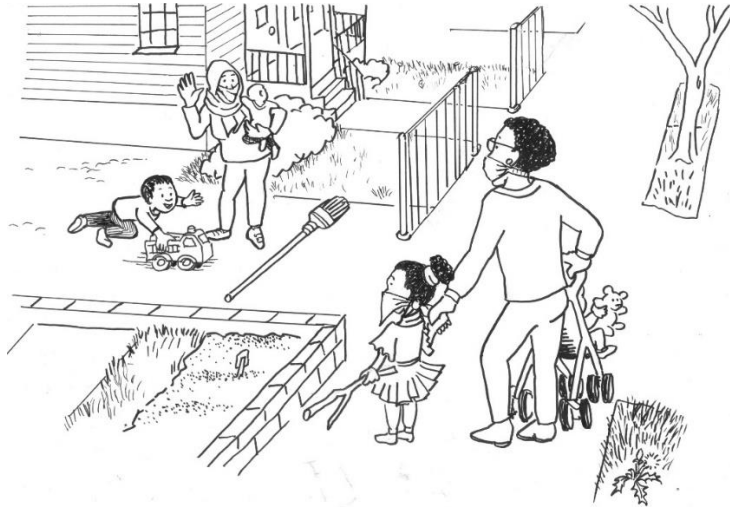
Once they are finished dancing, Auntie says, "Henry, please get our book basket out. Another way we can help each other feel more calm and less frustrated is by sharing some good stories. Let's all find a comfortable place to sit." Gabi smiles when she sees one of her favorite books in the basket.



School will be open again. (We just do not know when yet). Gabi will be able to see and play with her friends again. Waiting is hard but things will feel good and familiar again. Sharing her feelings and finding fun things to do at home and at Auntie Ana's will make it feel easier to wait.

The End

Note to Family Caregivers:



Thoughts from the folks at the Somerville Family Learning Collaborative in Massachusetts:

We are told to keep “social distance” from other people to stay safe in the world with the COVID-19 virus.

Social Distance makes it sound like we cannot be friendly with the people in our neighborhoods. But our social connections and our friendships bring us joy and hope and will help us get through the weeks ahead.

When you are out, keep a safe, physical distance by staying at least 6 feet (2 meters) away from other people, but your warm heart can reach out to others.

Say hello. Make eye contact and smile. Notice them. Have a conversation.

Let’s take care of ourselves and each other as a community until things return to normal.

Thanks to Janet Lane and Amy Bamforth