

'I HAVEN'T SEEN HER FACE LIGHT UP IN OVER A YEAR'

Continued from front

was outgoing, friendly and active in sports.

And now?

"She's more depressed, crying all the time, so much crying."

What does she say?

"Lots of questions, lots of despair, lots of: 'Why is this happening? When is this going to end? How much longer? When can I dance again? When can I have my theatre class again?'"

Her mental state deteriorated when schools opened and closed.

"Every time that happened, things got worse. Every time the school closed, she would fall deeper and deeper and deeper into things."

The state of some children's mental health was recognized by the Canadian Paediatric Society on May 7 when it posted on Facebook: "We cannot overstate the extent of the mental health crisis facing our children and youth. Our clinics and hospitals are overrun with

families seeking care for children and youth in distress — eating disorders, anxiety, hopelessness, depression, problematic substance use, and more."

For Vickers, help can't come soon enough.

"I feel like she's lost hope."

Her daughter is on a waiting list for therapy.

Vickers also has a nine-year-old daughter who has high functioning autism and struggled socially when she was younger.

"Just before the pandemic hit, she was doing really well. You know (learning) how to be a good friend. Doing much better at school ... now that the pandemic has hit, she hasn't really had the chance to be with other children, other than her sister."

Vickers brought up her 11-year-old's return to dance and gymnastics classes, but she's not interested.

"The last time she went, she remembers how far away she had to

be and how she had to wear a mask, and how scary it was."

For Vickers, it feels like starting over.

"I've just been frustrated with all the gains we were making, to have lost them all ... Like I said, she was seven when this pandemic started and now she's nine. And that's an important year. That's important pieces she's lost."

Before COVID, Vickers taught her how to approach children and now she's been telling her not to.

"She's so confused and I literally don't know how this is going to affect her."

The pandemic also negatively impacted one eight-year-old Thornhill resident who became scared people she loved would die.

In March 2020, her thoughts turned particularly bleak: "I'm lonely. I'm scared. I have no friends."

The pandemic caused her to be isolated.

"Not having play dates devastat-

ed her."

Her mother asked for anonymity because of what her daughter has been through.

"It's personal. I don't feel comfortable broadcasting her story."

Her daughter admitted one day in June 2020 that she was having dark thoughts and repeated them: "I don't want to be here anymore. I don't want to live anymore," she said, a month before her ninth birthday.

"I couldn't believe she was thinking this."

Her mother took her to the Hospital for Sick Children and she later benefitted from therapy with a social worker.

Their family ended up moving to Aurora in September 2020.

Today, the 10-year-old is in a better mind frame, her mother says.

Meanwhile, Christie Vickers looks to her daughters' future.

"What's the plan for them going forward? How will what they have been through and what they have

lost be dealt with?"

Her older daughter states what she wants: "I just want my old life back."

Vickers wants something similar: "I want my kids' life back ... I want my kids to be able to be kids. I want them to have their childhood."

To read part two in the series, click here.

To read part three in the series, click here.

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: With all of the school lockdowns and cancellation of activities, reporter Simone Joseph wondered about the impact COVID would have on children's mental health long term.



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GRADUATION 2021

Thoughtful gifts to commemorate graduation

By the time students reach graduation day, many have taken hundreds of tests, written scores of essays, worked through thousands of pencils, and made dozens of friends along the way. Such realities only underscore the notion that graduation is worthy of celebration.

Though not everyone may be able to gather this year for a blow-out graduation party, thoughtful gifts can show graduates their accomplishments have not gone unnoticed. The following are nine graduation gift ideas.

- **Keepsake blanket:** A blanket featuring school colours that's woven with photos or data about the graduate and graduating class makes a great keepsake.
- **Engraved compass:** Finding one's new direction will take time, and a symbolic compass with inspirational words can help guide

graduates on their future quests.

- **Jewelry:** Gift-givers may want to offer to pay for a school ring or can opt for different jewelry. For example, a necklace with the infinity symbol can represent infinite possibilities ahead. Those who collect charms for brace-



lets or necklaces can be gifted a graduation-themed charm.

- **Dorm room essentials:** Graduates going on to college will need a starter pack of essentials. A personalized tote bag filled with toiletries, linens and more will help graduates outfit their dorm rooms in style.

• **Inspirational art:** Graduates may want to revamp their bedrooms or decorate new dorm rooms. Framed inspirational verses, sayings or images can make ideal gifts.

- **Blue-blocking eye-glasses:** Blue-blocking lenses protect eyes from the harsh effects of blue light emitted from screens, a big benefit in an era when students and professionals spend ample time with their devices.

- **Meal subscription service:** In addition to gifting a cooking appliance like a slow cooker or air fryer, giving grads a subscription to a meal delivery service may help them transition to life without mom's cooking or the dining hall.

• **Streaming service:** Graduates can benefit from any number of streaming television and movie services to stay entertained while commuting or relaxing around the dorm with friends.

- **Luggage:** Whether students intend to take a gap year before college or enjoy a summer break before looking for their first job out of school, young adults will always get use out of a set of luggage or a carry-on bag.

Gifts for grads evolve throughout the years, but many gifts have withstood the test of time. (MCC)

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GRADUATES

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Our Class of 2021 Graduates are continuing their journey towards *Significance*.

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