

Reema Khrais: Can you give me your full name?

Aidan Gonzales: Aidan Gonzales

Reema Khrais: Aidan Gonzales, my name is Reema.

Aidan Gonzales: Okay.

Reema Khrais: **laughter** And how old are you, Aidan?

Aidan Gonzales: I'm 10. I'm 10 already.

Reema Khrais: Whoaaa! When did you turn 10?

Aidan Gonzales: Uh, the third of March. Wait, are you trying to steal my info?

Reema Khrais: **laughter** I'm not trying to steal anything. I just want to get to know you a little.

Aidan Gonzales: Oh.

Reema Khrais: But that's a good question. That's a smart question. And so what grade are you going into?

Aidan Gonzales: Um, I'm going into fifth.

Reema Khrais: Are you excited? How do you feel about it?

Aidan Gonzales: I feel kind of happy but I'm also kind of curious

Reema Khrais: Mmmm, about what?

Aidan Gonzales: About this school year that's gonna happen because of the virus that's going on.

<<music cue>>

Reema Khrais: Aidan lives with his mom, dad and little brother in Los Angeles. Shortly after his 10th birthday, California went under a stay at home order, and schooling went online.

Aidan Gonzales: I've also done a lot of virtual classes.

Reema Khrais: Oh, really? What was that like?

Aidan Gonzales: I...it was like, eyes not even awake yet. I'm like, **sleepily** good morning, teacher. Five hours of nothing but just teaching, teaching, teaching, teaching.

Reema Khrais: But luckily his Summer has been a bit more chill. He tells me about the minecraft he and his cousins play together online...

Aidan Gonzales: It's been a while since I last saw them.

Reema Khrais: All the art classes he's been taking...

Aidan Gonzales: I've been doing watercolor.

Reema Khrais: And, the rescue dog his family just adopted...

Aidan Gonzales: Her name is Conchita, also known as Little Bread. She's 10 years old. She has like a messed up foot.

Reema Khrais: For most kids, this pandemic has meant that their parents and guardians have become their full time teacher, playmate, cook...their *everything*...

Reema Khrais: And for Aidan it's also meant he's had to do a few more jobs around the house.

Aidan Gonzales: I have the the smelliest job on Earth. Picking up my dog's poop. I also help out with the laundry.

Reema Khrais: Do you get anything for doing the chores?

Aidan Gonzales: I don't get anything actually. Just get...I just get a thank you.

<<music fade>>

Reema Khrais: Family dynamics are changing a lot right now...and while the grown ups are definitely feeling it...it's pretty clear the kids are too

Aidan Gonzales: We're making history right now. Like, every second that goes by...

Reema Khrais: This is something Aidan says a lot when we're talking. He's so reflective, and so aware of just how huge this moment is that we're living through right now. And...how tough.

Aidan Gonzales: I'm getting teary eyed over here.

Reema Khrais: You're getting teary eyed. Why?

Aidan Gonzales: I don't know.

Reema Khrais: Aww, it's okay. Why do you think you're getting teary eyed?

Aidan Gonzales: Because what I'm saying is like history right here.

Reema Khrais: Aidan thinks a lot about what this means for his future, about when he'll see his friends in person again, and what the upcoming school year will feel like with online classes...but he's hopeful.

Aidan Gonzales: I think I'll be prepar...more prepared now. Since um, now we know all of Zoom's secrets!

Reema Khrais: I'm not sure anyone knows all of Zoom's secrets. Or, really, any secrets about how to cope with this time. The pandemic has rocked the lives of a lot of families...when it comes to childcare and their finances...and just life at home

Reema Khrais: And kids like Aidan...are grappling with big questions

Aidan Gonzales: What's the future gonna look like? Will we ever escape this heck hole?

Reema Khrais: I too would like to know when we'll get out of this heck hole.

<<theme music posts>>

Reema Khrais: I'm Reema Khrais and welcome to This Is Uncomfortable...a show from Marketplace about life and how money messes with it.

Reema Khrais: This week, I talk with one family about a system they created - well before quarantine - that's helping them get through the pandemic.

Reema Khrais: Then later in the show, some advice from an expert -- and from kids -- on how to cope with this time

<<theme ends>>

Reema Khrais: Would you consider yourself competitive?

Joaquin Andrade: Yes, definitely. I'm competitive in everything.

Reema Khrais: Really?

Joaquin Andrade: From board games to soccer.

Reema Khrais: Why do you think you're so competitive?

Joaquin Andrade: I don't know. I was born like that.

Reema Khrais: Like a lot of 11 year olds ... Joaquin Andrade is REALLY into whatever he's into. Especially when it comes to soccer. Everyone in his family roots for a different pro soccer team, but he knows which one's best.

Joaquin Andrade: Umm my team. I'll call my, my dad's team trash sometimes

Reema Khrais: Joaquin's team is Real Madrid. He also plays on a soccer team...but because of the pandemic, they can't have games right now.

<<music cue>>

Reema Khrais: So lately, he's found other ways to blow off steam and new hobbies to obsess over during quarantine...

Joaquin Andrade: I had just started biking way more. Like suddenly, it felt refreshing because sometimes I was just so fed up of what was happening in my house.

Reema Khrais: Like what kind of stuff?

Joaquin Andrade: Uh, like my brother being annoying, my parents being like impatient and like super strict.

Reema Khrais: For Joaquin -- riding his red mountain bike down the driveway then down the hill and through the neighborhood...was like this escape into another world. A world far away from online school, and chores, and parents constantly in Zoom work meetings.

Reema Khrais: Eventually, he wanted company and asked his dad to join. And he wanted a bike upgrade...so they could go offroading together.

Joaquin Andrade: So he said we would get BMX bikes. To that...so that we could both go on bike rides.

Reema Khrais: So, Joaquin searched online...and found THE ONE. This dark green bike that just looked so cool. The only problem -- he did not have the \$300 to buy it.

Joaquin Andrade: I said, I really like this one. And my dad said, okay, you're going to have to work for it. So we made a deal.

Reema Khrais: Where Joaquin saw adventure...his dad saw opportunity.

<<music hard end>>

Reema Khrais: Cause this family -- they actually have a whole SYSTEM to bribe each other whenever someone wants something.

Reema Khrais: It's been working really well for them lately...because these days...with the pandemic...and the whole family -- Joaquin, his parents, and his little brother -- home ALL the time...there's just so much more to negotiate and compromise on. But they actually came up with this system years ago

Joaquin Andrade: It really started when me and my dad had like a few fights about what we agreed to.

Reema Khrais: For example, Joaquin would agree to get good grades in exchange for, say, a new video game...but inevitably, when it came down to it...he and his dad would each remember the details of the deal differently...and they'd fight.

Reema Khrais: So after one argument too many, the family started negotiating these formal contracts...and writing everything down.

Reema Khrais: Like how many minutes Joaquin would have to spend outside to earn computer time. Or my personal favorite...when Joaquin's dad wanted to buy new car parts...he agreed...in exchange he'd have to go on the scariest ride in Disney World...Tower of Terror...

Joaquin Andrade: It feels official because like my parents actually use their like real signature.

Reema Khrais: **laughter** Do you have a signature?

Joaquin Andrade: I just write my name in cursive and then put my soccer number.

Reema Khrais: And to make it super official, they post all the contracts on the fridge for everyone to see.

<<music cue>>

Reema Khrais: So when it came to Joaquin and his quest for a new bike...he sat down at the dinner table with his dad one night, ready to negotiate the terms of a new contract.

Joaquin Andrade: I'm always pushing for like, um, like a more fair deal because sometimes the deals that they make aren't exactly the fairest.

Reema Khrais: The bike negotiations started off easy. Get up early and watch his 5 year old brother? Sure. Take out the trash, empty the cat litter box and keep the playroom clean? Worth it for a bike.

Reema Khrais: But then came the real stakes. Joaquin's taking these math classes over the summer. And his dad told him he'd have to get 97% or higher on every single math assignment.

Reema Khrais: That didn't seem fair.

Joaquin Andrade: I didn't think that I could do that. Like every single time. So I said lower it by five and yeah.

Reema Khrais: And how did they respond when you said that?

Joaquin Andrade: Um, they said, okay.

<<music hard end>>

Reema Khrais: 92%...still a challenge. But it felt more doable. And so this summer Joaquin got to work...dragging trash cans, watching his little brother, and doing math problem after math problem. Telling himself--

Joaquin Andrade: This is for the bike. This is for the bike.

Reema Khrais: I can imagine, like being kind of nervous that you might not be able to finish everything in the contract?

Joaquin Andrade: Yeah, there's been a few times where I didn't want to do RSM.

Reema Khrais: RSM...that's his math program. It was tough. We're talking fractions, decimals ... three AND four digit multiplication.

Reema Khrais: Even his dad, Kevin Andrade was nervous for him when it came to this one assignment.

Kevin Andrade: He was at like, I think he was at like 83% or 85%, or something like that And he was going to essentially default on his portion of the contract. He was not going to get the 92%

Reema Khrais: Were you thinking that you would actually not give him the bike if he didn't get at least 92%? Like, would you actually have gone through with that?

Kevin Andrade: I would have had to. Yeah.

<<music cue>>

Reema Khrais: Yeah. They take these contracts super seriously.

Reema Khrais: To Joaquin, the contract was all about getting a bike. But for his parents, it was also a framework to help him become more independent...and try new things.

Reema Khrais: So to make sure he held up his end of the deal, Joaquin's mom, Autumn Andrade-de Leon, enrolled him in an online help session...even though he really didn't want that.

Autumn Andrade-de Leon: And I just remember telling him, you know, sometimes we all need help. And this was just an opportunity for him to practice that. And it didn't mean anything about the person that he was or his abilities.

Kevin Andrade: You know, within three minutes they had figured out what was sort of short circuiting. His ability to solve those problems. And in another three minutes it was done, so he got over the hurdle he got over the fear.

Reema Khrais: He bumped his grade up. He'd held up his end of the bargain. So just a few weeks ago...Joaquin's dad took him to the store to pick up his BMX.

Joaquin Andrade: When I saw it come out, it looked so cool.

Reema Khrais: Really?

Joaquin Andrade: The paint job looks super cool combined with the rest of the bike.

Reema Khrais: Nice.

Joaquin Andrade: It felt awesome.

<<music hard end>>

Reema Khrais: For Joaquin's mom Autumn, these contracts aren't just a way to bribe her kid whenever he wants a new game or gadget. They're a way to include him in decisions around money and rules -- instead of flying solo as parents.

Reema Khrais: And by making things all formal, and official...they're leveling the playing field and helping the family keep the peace.

Autumn Andrade-de Leon: That's my goal, anyway -- peace.

Reema Khrais: Yeah?

Kevin: Yeah. No, it's Yeah, that's, that's true. That's, that's very true

Reema Khrais: I know you're part of a soccer team, but I wonder if you've ever thought of your own family as a team...too?

Joaquin Andrade: Yeah, it's kind of like a team. You're obviously thinking about what you want, but you also have to be aware of the needs of others and like what they want too. Being on a team, it doesn't matter who scored the goal as long as your team scored the goal.

Reema Khrais: Right, it's about the team and not about you.

Joaquin Andrade: Yeah.

Reema Khrais: And do you feel like contracts make the team work better?

Joaquin Andrade: Yeah. There's less arguing. And everyone's more happy.

<<music cue>>

Reema Khrais: Right now, I feel like we're all doing a balancing act...finding a way to get through these weird times...while trying to maintain some semblance of control over our lives. For Joaquin's family...these contracts are a familiar framework they can fall back on...

Autumn Andrade-de Leon: Our home life is more peaceful. The world is kind of raging outside and as adults we deal with that, but our kids don't need to. And I do feel like yes, it absolutely confirmed my belief in family contracts.

Reema Khrais: So, Joaquin's gearing up to ride his new bike. And bracing for the day his 5 year old brother Reuben makes it to the negotiating table.

Autumn Andrade-de Leon: Hey Reuben, if you were going to write a contract for something that you wanted, what would you want?

Reuben Andrade: A lifetime supply of candy.

Reema Khrais: **laughs** Love it.

Kevin Andrade: There you go.

Reema Khrais: The kid drives a hard bargain.

Reema Khrais: Alright, coming up after the break...more kids and some helpful advice.

<<Music hard end>>

<<BREAK>>

Reema Khrais: Like we heard from Aidan at the top of the episode, this time can be hard for kids...especially if they're stuck at home with parents who are busy working. So we asked them to give us their very best advice on how to deal...

Child miscellaneous: If this is recording right now, which of course it is...I think I would just say, just be cool about it. Just be...have happy thoughts about it.

Child misc: How to be happy at home...

Child misc: Try something that you wouldn't normally do, because most people have a lot of time on their hands now...

Child misc: **wistfully** You just play outside and **suddenly stern** do more nightly walks!

Child misc: You could play with your toys...

Child misc: Reading...

Child misc: How to help your family right now...

Child misc: You should help out around the house as much as you can.

Child misc: If you have a dog please pick up their poop.

Child misc: Be quiet when they are in meetings...

Child misc: Be generous, be kind, share the looove.

Child misc: And simply give them a nice big smile!

Child misc: For parents I would suggest...taking it easy on their kids.

Child misc: Have patience and be kind.

Child misc: Try to not get super overwhelmed and overworked...and also you should ask for help on things that you want to do specifically so the first thing doesn't happen.

Child misc: Advice for how dad can cope with his company laying him off and finding a new job after 21 years. Be grateful for what you have, and what you've done, and be hopeful that you will get a job.

Reema Khrais: Thanks to Aidan Gonzalez, Otis Olson, Seth Juvland (JOO-vland), Maggie Tuhy (two-e) and Soren Anderson for the excellent advice.

Reema Khrais: We also wanted to share some tips for parents about how to cope with this time... so I called up Jamilah Lemieux -- she writes an advice column for Slate's 'Care and Feeding' parenting section and she cohosts Slate's "Mom and Dad are fighting" podcast...

Reema Khrais: I asked her what seems to be coming up the most for parents...

Jamilah Lemieux: From the letters that we get, it seems that there are parents that are spending a lot more time thinking about the ways in which they're negotiating with their kids. There's definitely a lot of power struggles happening, you know, teenagers in particular, you know, who would have had autonomous time outside of the house. So to go from, you know, I can go to the mall and be gone for seven or eight hours in a day and not have to, you know, do much else other than check in to now be in the house, you know, essentially 24/7. It's definitely changed a lot and it's exacerbated some existing tensions for sure.

Reema Khrais: What kind of strategies have you seen that seemed to work well? Like, you know, thinking about negotiations, like, Is it okay for, like parents, for example, to bribe their kids to...so that they can stay away during like an important zoom call?

Jamilah Lemieux: Absolutely. I think incentivizing.

Reema Khrais: Yeah, maybe incentivize is a better word than bribe.

Jamilah Lemieux: Incentivizing good behaviour has definitely been an important strategy for a lot of us. You know, I'm somebody who has always incentivized, you know, needing a space to work quietly at home because I've, you know, worked

remotely for quite some time. Uh, and I think right now, considering how much our children have lost, you know, as frustrated as I feel about my own loss of, you know, my social life and being disconnected from friends and family in many ways, and not being able to do certain things personally or professionally, that I would have been able to do if we weren't living through a pandemic. I also think a lot of us as parents are recognizing that we were not in the position that our children were in at this point in our lives and you know...

Reema Khrais: Totally.

Jamilah Lemieux: It's okay if you have to put some extra sprinkles, you know, on the ice cream to help them get through it right now.

Reema Khrais: We've uh, talked to some kids this week who've been really thoughtful about the pandemic and how it's impacting their lives. And I'd love to get some advice from you on how parents should be talking to their kids about what's going on right now.

Jamilah Lemieux: It's better to start feeding them information from a very young age and talking to them about, you know, the world around them, you know, essentially from the point in which they started talking, as far as Coronavirus, goes specifically, you know, ensuring that they know the precautions that they can take as individuals to protect themselves that they understand that school has not been closed and camp has not been, you know, shut down to punish them or, you know, out of a overabundance of caution but because there is you know, something that is dangerous and that could harm us but that you are going to do everything in your power to keep them safe and that you're going to make responsible decisions and you have to model that, you know, if you are keeping your kids socially distance but they see you engaging in High Risk activity that is going to teach...not only are you putting them potentially a risk, you're also modeling something for them. Right and and not modeling the correct thing.

Reema Khrais: And thinking about, like, sort of the financial component to this, how much do you feel like parents should talk openly with their kids?

Jamilah Lemieux: I think that with respect to how much information your children have um, about the household finances, how much they are able to comprehend and understand about, you know, what it means to lose a job. And, you know, for some

families, the loss of a job is an immediate crisis. And for others, you know, there's savings and resources that can be tapped into, you know, I mean, I think it would be great for families that are more comfortable in these situations to be transparent with their children, because, you know, they're not necessarily going to perhaps feel the impact...but it's still an important lesson for kids to understand about the instability of the workforce, you know, that that jobs are not guaranteed that you don't have it until you don't want to have it anymore.

Jamilah Lemieux: I think they should understand when their parents are facing something that, you know, creates a certain level of additional stress, but you also don't want to burden them so much.

Reema Khrais: Right, and stress them out.

Jamilah Lemieux: ...with this information. Yeah, that they're not able to function. So you know, these are the things that I need you to do to be helpful during this time. But I don't want you to feel like you're responsible for this. You know, I don't need you to try to figure out how to make money or you know how to take care of us, but, you know, to just be patient cooperative and understanding.

Reema Khrais: Alright that is all for this week's show...but before we go -- I just want to give a little plug..if you have kids and you want something made especially for them

Reema Khrais: Marketplace actually has a new podcast *for* kids...Answering all the awkward, surprising, tricky questions they have about money...

Reema Khrais: It's called Million Bazillion -- I love that name and it's hosted by my very funny colleague, Jed Kim....

Reema Khrais: Here's a peek at one episode they did that teaches kids how to negotiate...the RIGHT way...

Reema Khrais: Using compromise and listening...but also, pretending like you're a secret agent spy...and you're on a mission:

<<excerpt Million Bazillion>>

Jed Kim: And anyone knows, a successful mission is all about preparation...

Bridget Bodnar: So step one: gather intel. That means find out everything you can about the discussion at hand. Ask the other side questions, do research on the topic to

support your side, talk to someone who already figured out how to negotiate for the thing you're asking for...

Reema Khrais: You can listen to the rest of that and check out more episodes of Million Bazillion from Marketplace, wherever you get your podcasts

Reema Khrais: Also, so you all know, we are taking a few weeks to work on some new, exciting stories...and we'll be officially back with new episodes in mid-September. In the meantime, if you want to stay in touch with us...you can find me on Twitter or Instagram @reemakhrais and you can always email us with your stories or thoughts or rants or whatever at uncomfortable@marketplace.org.

Reema Khrais: Alright...this is Uncomfortable is me, Reema Khrais, Megan Detrie, Hayley Hershman, Peter Balonon-Rosen and Eliza Mills.

Our intern is Daniel Martinez

Tony Wagner is our digital producer

Drew Jostad is our audio engineer

Editing this week by Samantha Fields

Sitara Nieves is the Executive director of on-demand

Deb Clark is the senior vice president and general manager of Marketplace.

And our theme music is by Wonderly.

Alright, I'll catch y'all in September.