



# Family Literacy in the Time of COVID-19

Impact Now and Moving Forward  
Denny Taylor, 2020

Women's Federation for World Peace, International



For families COVID-19 is the biggest public health crisis since 1918, and it is changing not only the ways families live, but also the ways in which parents care for their children.



**Around the world many families are still sheltering in place. How do we talk to our children about not going to school and staying home?**

**People are seen in their windows in a residential building in Mumbai on Monday, April 27, 2020**



In every country infected by COVID-19 healthcare workers are separated from their families .

After 24 hour shifts some doctors and nurses in New York City are sleeping in campers in hospital parking lots.

“I feel guilty,” a nurse says, “not being there for my husband and child. My son is only five and I don’t want to get either of them sick.”




A remarkable fact is that there are already family literacy initiatives in local, regional and global contexts that focus on public health emergencies that impact the health and well-being and even the survival of vulnerable families.






There are three evidence-based aspects of family literacy initiatives that support governments using the family as a dynamic organizing principle to respond to COVID-19 as well as create more inclusive societies.



FIRST: Family literacy has become a vital and successful way of promoting literacy in families and communities that improves life circumstances and increases the literacy levels in many UN Member States.





## SECOND: Family literacy is used to frame peace enhancing initiatives in U.N. Member States.

Family literacy initiatives have been documented that include: the global pandemic and other public health emergencies, political upheaval, violent conflict, environmental stresses and biodiversity loss, global warming and the climate emergency, high levels of human displacement and migration flows, and providing support for the world's refugees and internally displaced persons who are denied their right to return home.

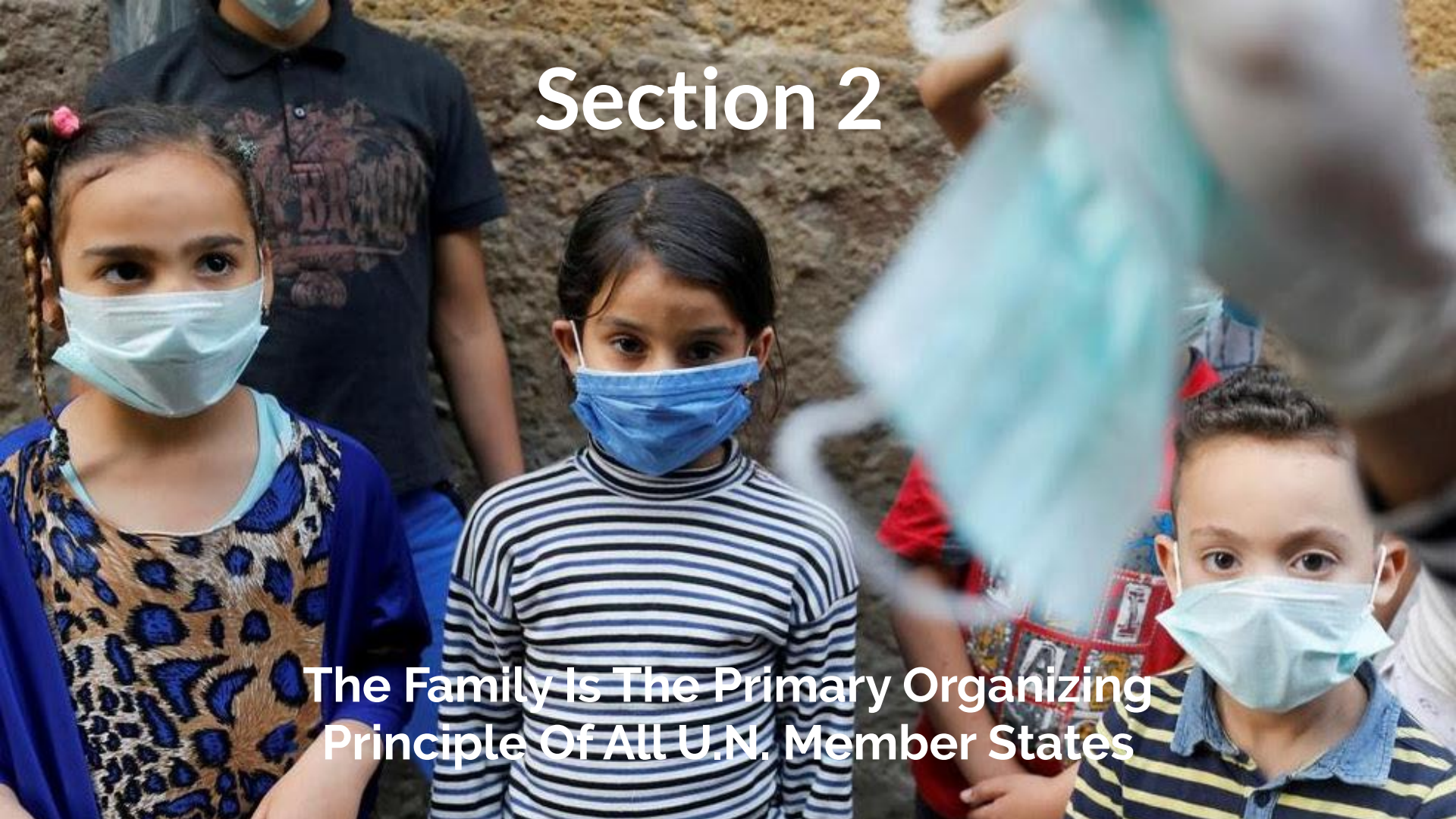


THIRD: Family literacy is integral to and in keeping with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

A systematic analysis of the family literacy initiatives undertaken by UN Member States indicates that family literacy is used in most countries in peace building and in ways that are in keeping with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.


# Section 2

The Family Is The Primary Organizing  
Principle Of All U.N. Member States



Eleanor Roosevelt - Universal Declaration  
of Human Rights at the U.N. in 1948





In the preamble to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights Eleanor Roosevelt and her contemporaries state:

“Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.”

We ignore this fact at our peril.

This is what Eleanor Roosevelt and the founders of the United Nations would say if they were here to guide us.



It is important that every decision-maker is aware that the family is the one common element of every human society, and that the family is the primary and most essential organizing principle in every U.N. member state.

And so, to those who hold power, this webinar serves as a gentle reminder that children and their families belong at the heart of all decision-making about the future of human societies.

Risks confronting families include global pandemics, political upheavals, violent conflicts, biodiversity loss and the climate emergency





Focusing on the health and wellbeing of children and their families provides a new way to measure a country's progress and standing in the world.

It is the only progress that counts, all other measurements should be subsumed and many discarded as unethical and unjust and irrelevant to our survival.



A photograph of several children wearing face masks. In the foreground, a girl on the left wears a light blue surgical mask and a leopard-print top. In the center, a girl wears a blue surgical mask and a black and white striped turtleneck. On the right, a boy wears a light blue surgical mask and a blue and yellow striped polo shirt. A large, out-of-focus light blue surgical mask is in the foreground on the right side. The background shows a dirt ground and other people, including a boy in a dark polo shirt with a graphic on it.

# Section 3

We learn language, about language,  
and through language



**It is through language and literacy that all decisions are made**  
**The literacies of families are important in many unimagined or long forgotten life affirming ways**

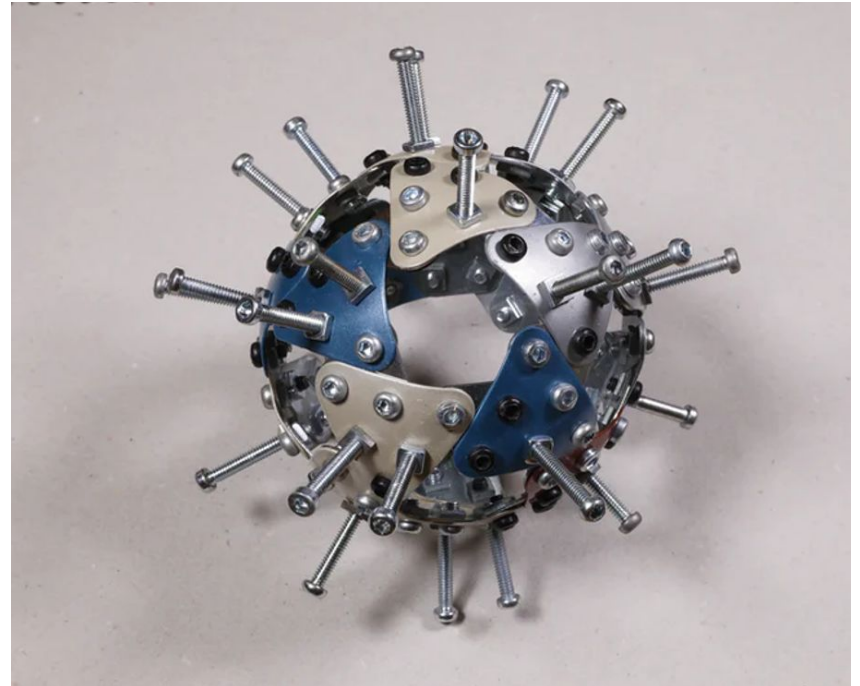
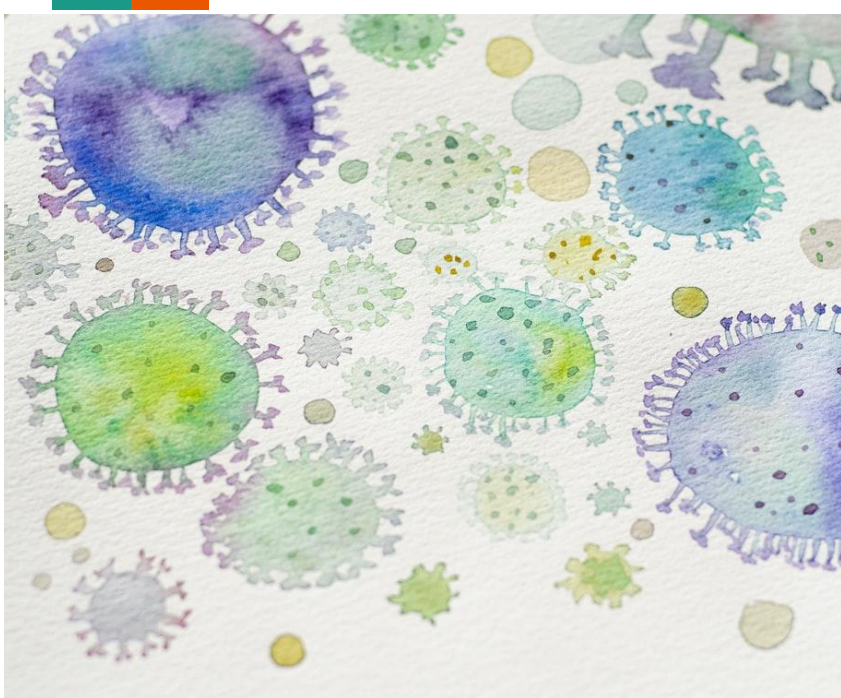


Our knowledge of language provides useful ways of thinking about the impact of the pandemic on families and communities in local and global contexts.

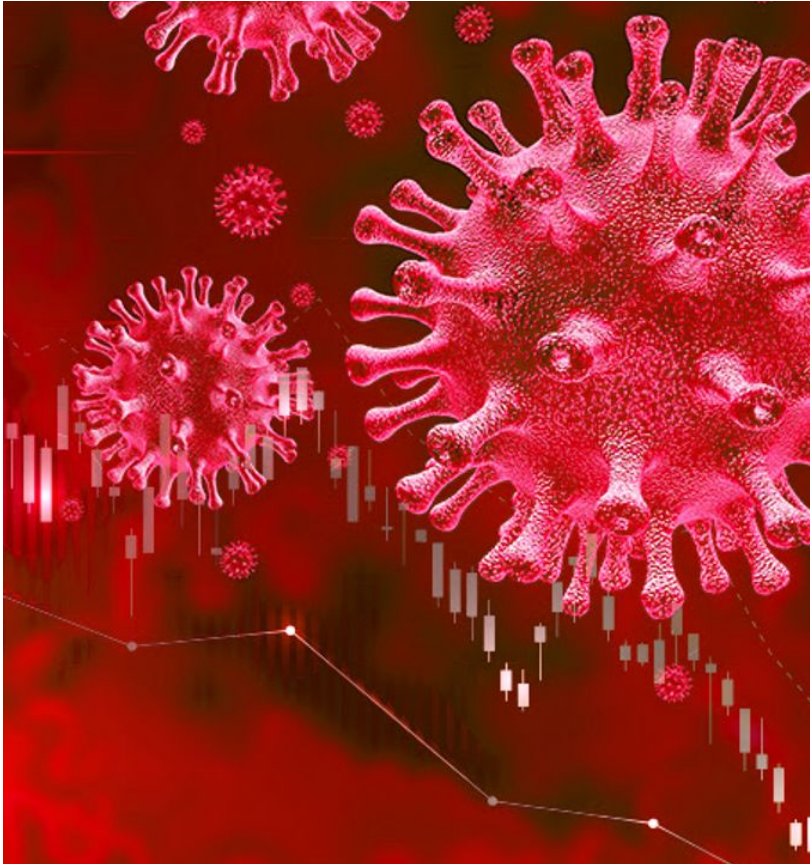


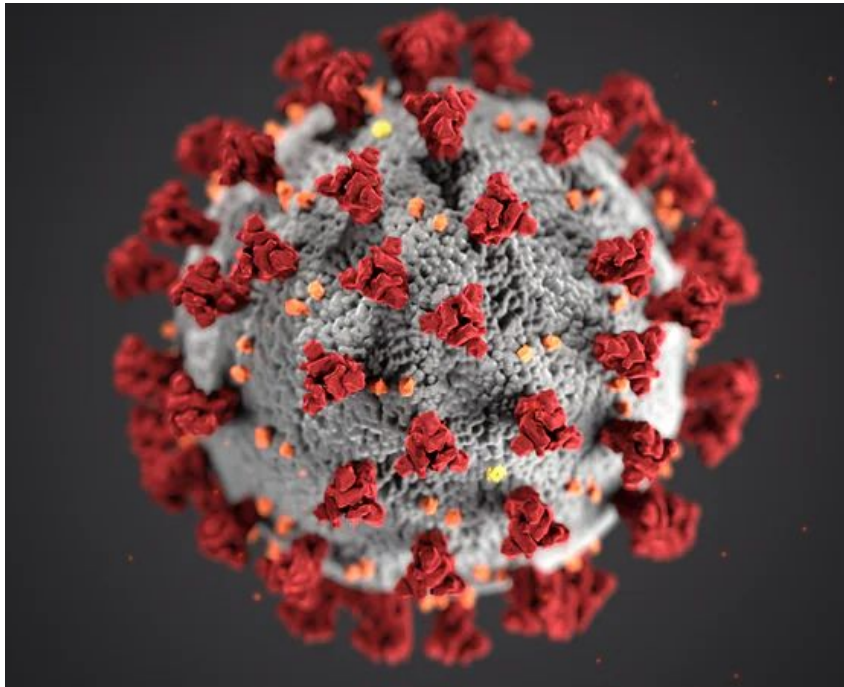
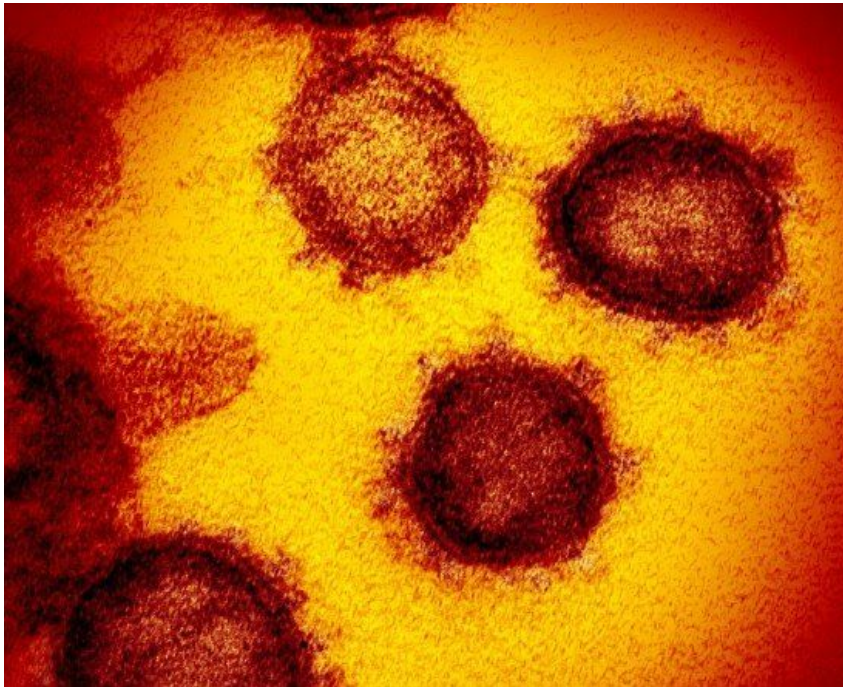
COVID-19 has created the conditions for a GLOBAL READING LESSON.

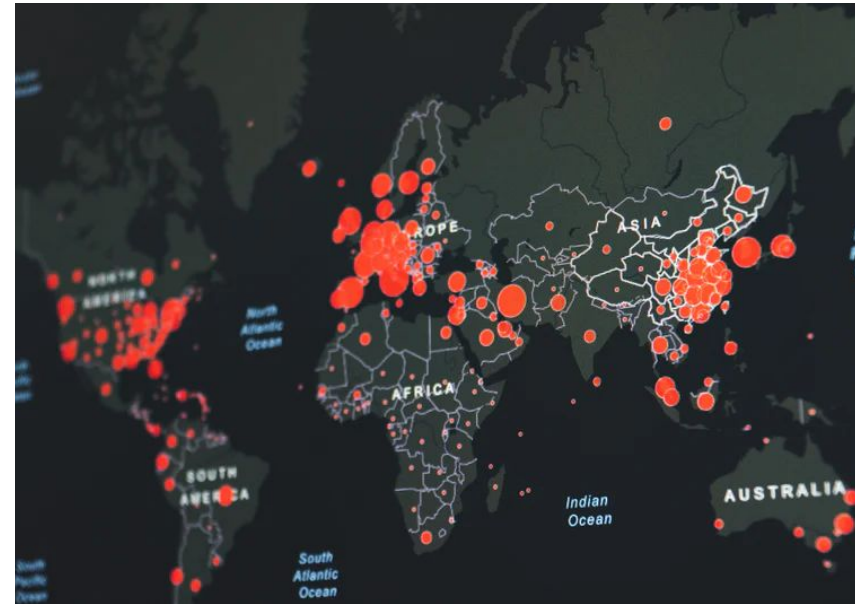
Symbols and words have become universal, creating collective understandings of the impact of the virus on families and communities around the world.



Wherever we are on the planet we know what COVID-19 looks like. We recognize representations of the virus however they are constructed.







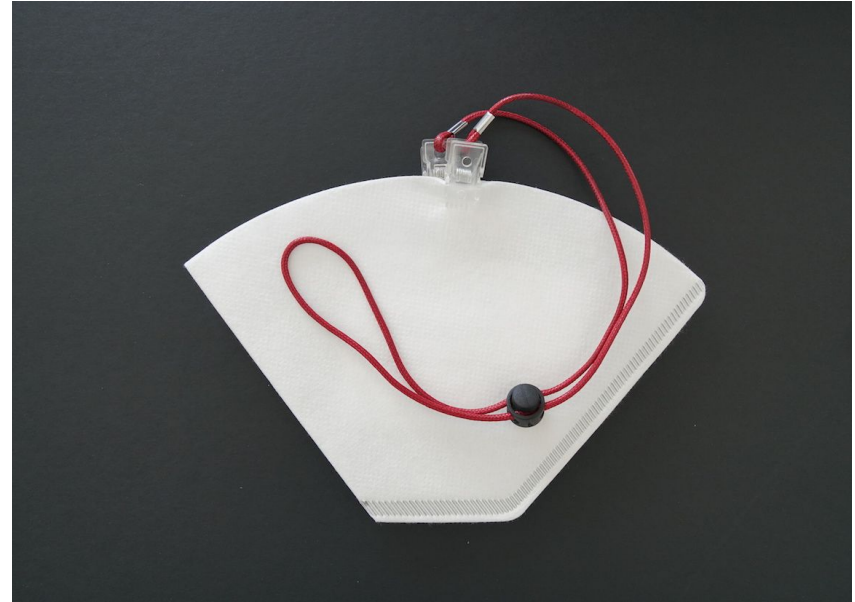
Our capacity to read globally and act locally creates many opportunities for families in all human societies to participate in a determined worldwide effort to eliminate the virus and build a better world



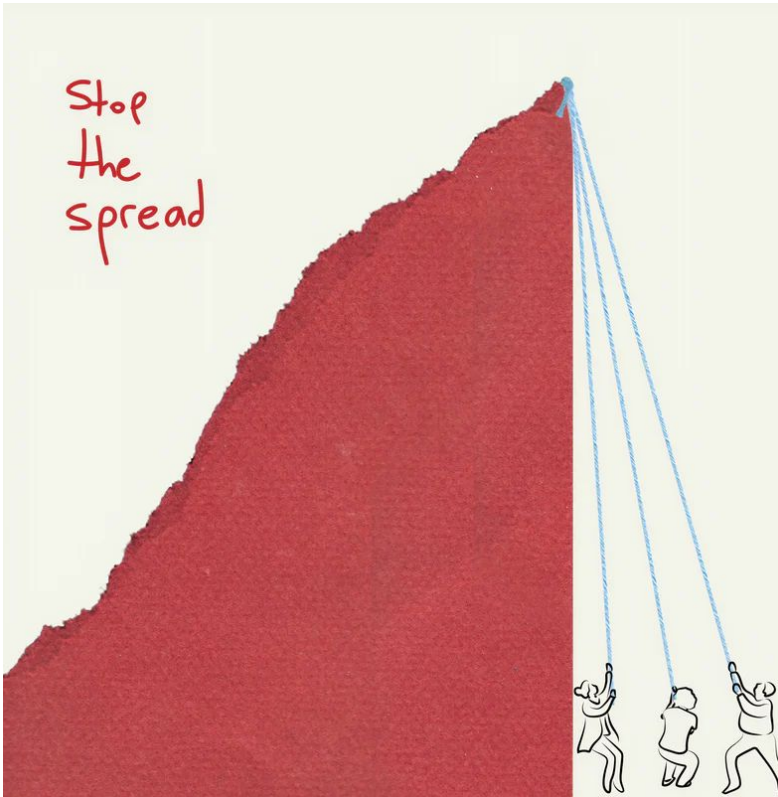


We know the meaning of images of hand washing and mask wearing.  
We can interpret pictorial images that warn us not shed and spread.  
We know we must do everything we can to flatten the curves.

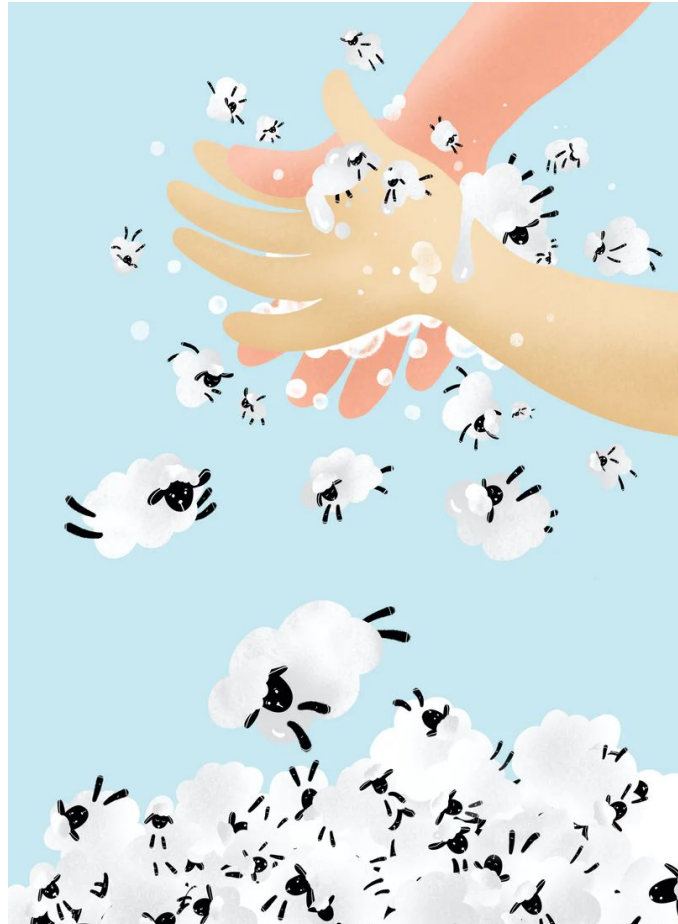
We understand the picture that warns us not to touch our face, and even though the soap bubbles look like sheep we know that the black marks represent germs and the virus.



Is it a Melitta coffee filter or a COVID-19 mask? We recognize it as a mask bringing a new universally understood meaning to an object we already know.



We can all read these image from the United Nations



A photograph of two small, scruffy dogs sitting on a porch. The dog on the left is wearing a grey ventilated mask with a circular filter on the front and a red bandana with a white geometric pattern around its neck. The dog on the right is also wearing a similar grey ventilated mask and a red bandana. They are positioned in front of a green door with a white frame, set against a brick wall with blue-painted trim. The text is overlaid on the lower half of the image.

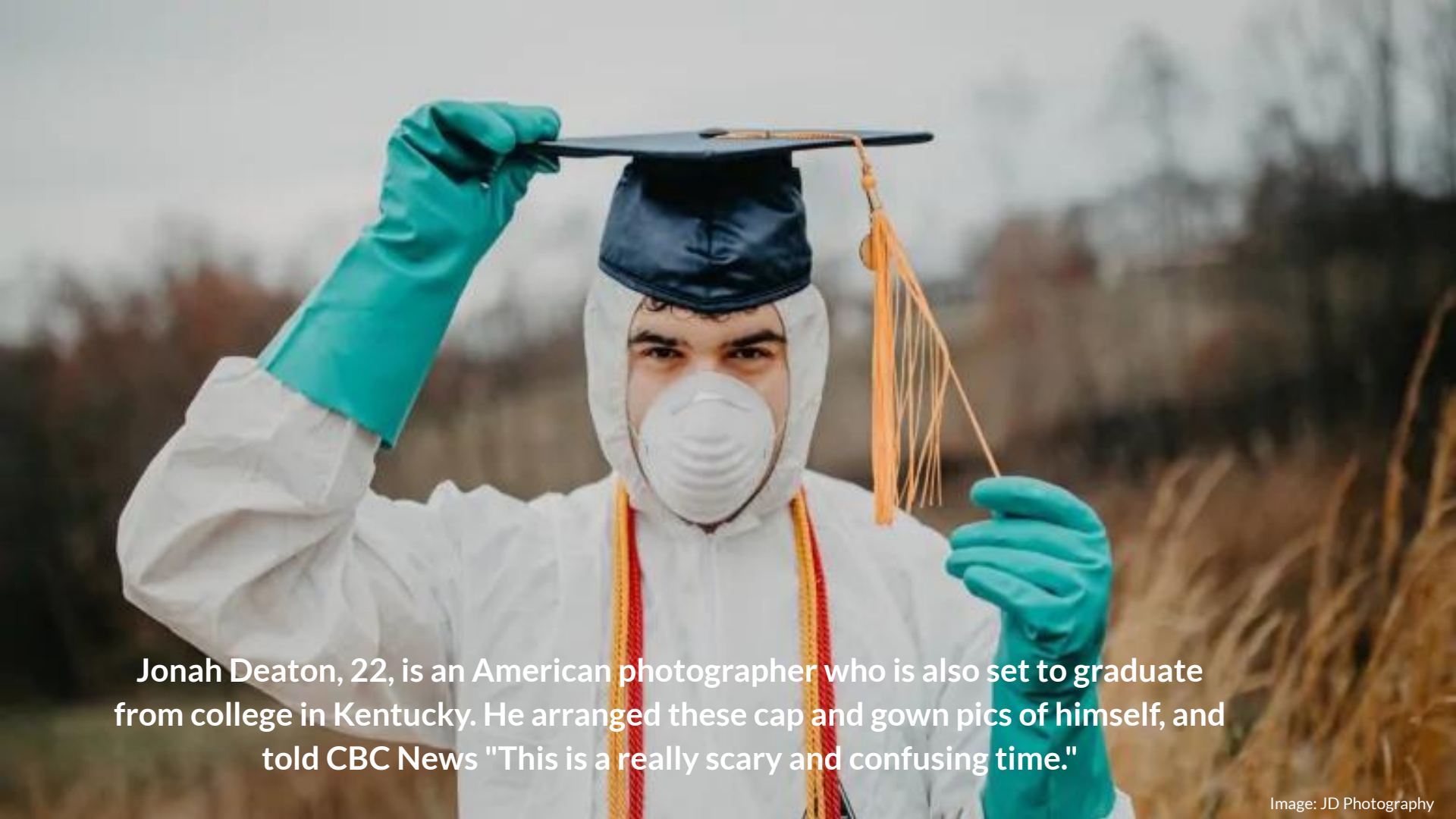
We care for each other and try to stay strong, finding the absurdity in the whole situation. We put masks on our dogs and ...

Izzie, left, and Tippi wear ventilated dog masks in Philadelphia on April 6

A group of people are seated at an outdoor cafe on a cobblestone street. They are wearing large, colorful pool noodles (blue, yellow, red, green) on their heads. The noodles are positioned to create a physical barrier between them, ensuring social distancing. The cafe is set up with small tables and chairs. In the background, other people are walking on the street, and buildings line the sidewalk. The scene is bright and sunny.

... wear pool noodles on our heads that a cafe provides to ensure we practice social distancing when we sit and have wine outside

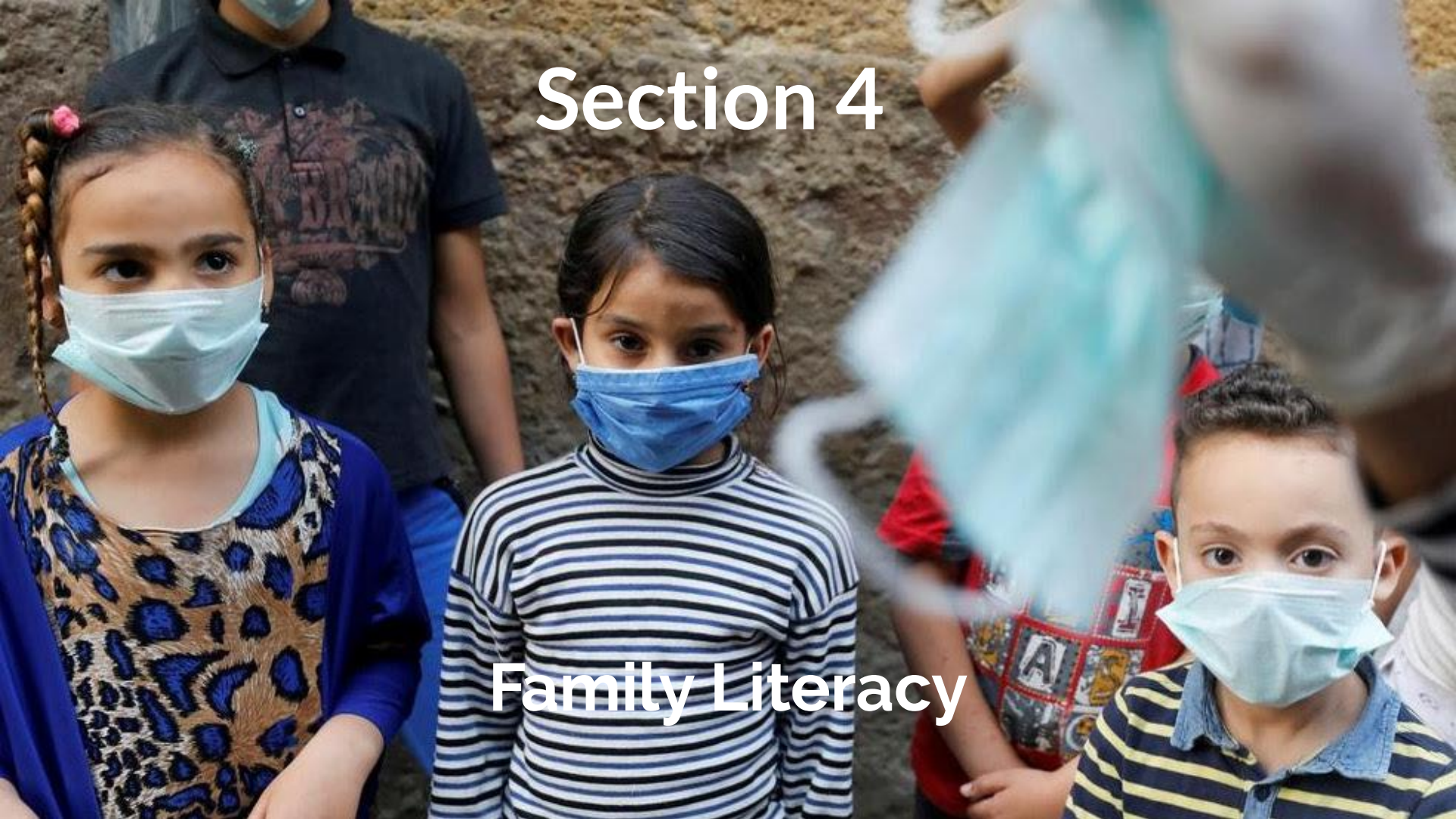
The Cafe Rothe recently reopened after Germany lifted coronavirus lockdown measures

A young man is shown from the chest up, wearing a white full-body protective suit with a hood, a white N95-style face mask, and teal nitrile gloves. He is holding a black graduation cap with a gold tassel. He is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with dry grass and trees.

Jonah Deaton, 22, is an American photographer who is also set to graduate from college in Kentucky. He arranged these cap and gown pics of himself, and told CBC News "This is a really scary and confusing time."

# Section 4

Family Literacy







## Family literacy fosters ties between nations

Surprising to many and unnoticed by most UN Member States, there are multilateral initiatives taking place right now that unite people in local communities in many countries of the world.

Family literacy initiatives that enhance peace, reduce poverty, build resilience and bridge economic and social gaps have been found in more than 140 UN Member States that are locally led and regionally and internationally supported, including these countries.



## U.N. Member States in which there are or have been Family Literacy Projects and Initiatives

Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Bhutan, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Congo, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Finland, France, Gabon, Gambia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Latvia, Lesotho, Liberia, Luxembourg, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Micronesia (Federated States), Montenegro, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Palau, Paraguay, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saint Lucia, Samoa, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Timor-Leste, Togo, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Vietnam, Yemen.

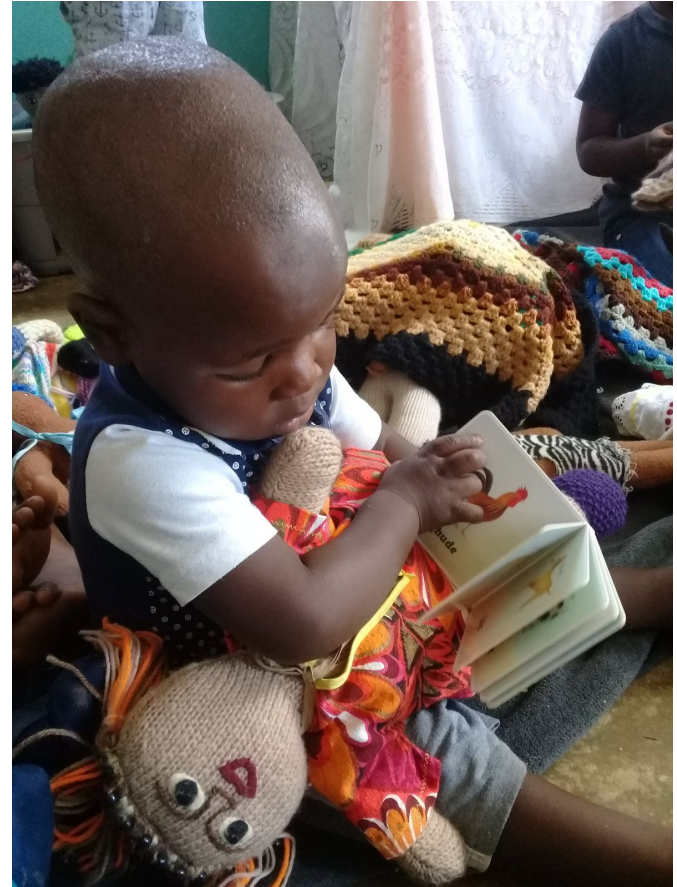


**Family Literacy Project South Africa**  
October 5, 2017



## Family Literacy Project South Africa

Family literacy is a research based, capacity building concept, based on ancient traditions, that has a proven global record of projects and initiatives that can result in rapid transformative change in a post-COVID-19 world.





Family Literacy Project South Africa  
June 9, 2016



## Family Literacy Project South Africa

“These boys take their Uthando Dolls with them everywhere, even to School. They are their reliable and present companions.”

September 21, 2017



**FLP South Africa facilitators enjoying the sun after a very successful week of training with Claudi from Dlalanthi. The Family Support training is sure to benefit our groups and the Home Visitors greatly**

**August 21, 2015**



## Family Literacy Project South Africa

“Another excited Foundation Phase Learner reading one of the newly published FLP books developed in collaboration with the African Storybook Project- 75 new Zulu titles for emerging readers! S M: Amazing well done FLP #ForTheLoveOfOurFutureLeaders”







# Family Literacy Project South Africa

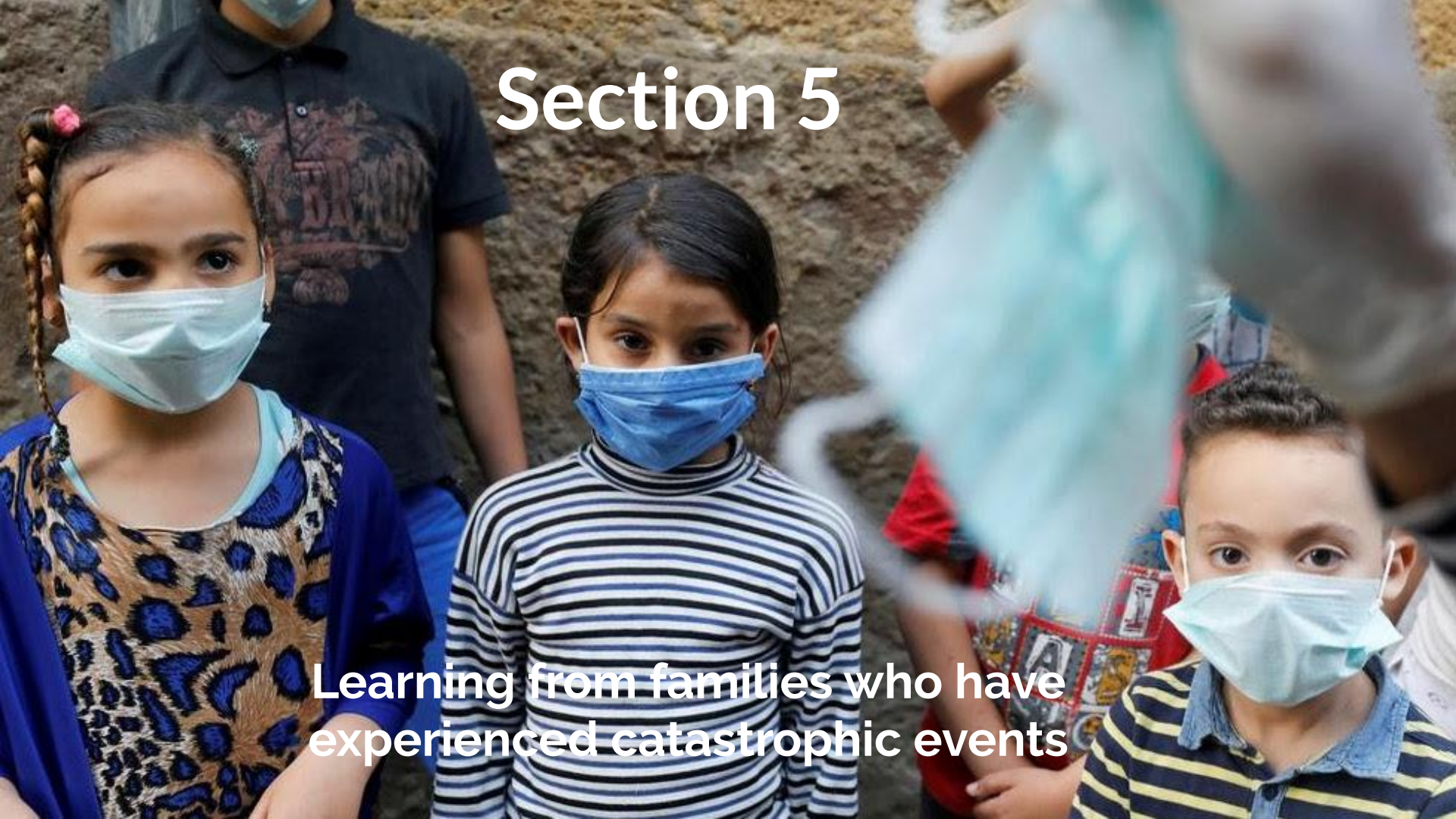
January 30, 2019




**Family Literacy Project South Africa**  
August 23, 2017

# Section 5

Learning from families who have experienced catastrophic events





Our focus now is the establishment of policies and practices to ameliorate the suffering of families due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, to reduce the extreme risks, and to address unequal access of families to all essential support systems in human societies.

Our task is made easier because family literacy projects and initiatives have already been established that can contribute to the global effort to address the impact of COVID-19, to reduce poverty, to build resilience and a better future for all families around the world.



The goal is to use family literacy frameworks for sustaining peace to respond to COVID-19, while maintaining a proactive response to the destructive impacts of the ravages of war on children.



**Family literacy projects that focus on the peaceful relocation of refugees and economic migrants also provide opportunities for public health initiatives to reduce the impact of COVID-19.**



Migrant workers and their children waiting to board a train from Mumbai, India, to the state of Uttar Pradesh last week




**Countries including Afghanistan, Nepal, and Sub Saharan Africa that offer village based family literacy programs, which seek to develop literacy in the context of community needs, including psychosocial needs of women and children and responding to war trauma and PTSD, could also focus on COVID-19.**






**Millions of Afghan children at risk of hunger amid coronavirus lockdown measures**



When the Covid-19 outbreak started in Afghanistan in March 2020, the government quickly imposed lockdowns, severely restricting movement to no more than shopping for basic needs and banning travel between cities.

As a result, food prices have soared in the war-torn and impoverished country, leaving a third of the population facing a food shortage in May. According to a report released on May 1 by the non-governmental organisation Save the Children, 7.3 million children are among those now at risk.



A cautionary note is also relevant at this time. When a traumatic event takes place please do not ask children or adults to tell you what happened.

This is the work of health care professionals who have expertise in working with individuals who are traumatised.

Most of us do not have such training and the last thing we want is for the child or adult to relive a traumatic experience.



## Hurricane Katrina

In a small group session with the school social worker, a third grade girl wrote:

“I feel sad. I saw people dead in the water.”



The Nobel Laureate, Eric Kandel writes, extremely stressful events, reminders of the initial trauma often trigger recurrent episodes of fear.

He writes, “the memory of traumatic experiences remains powerful for decades and is readily reactivated by a variety of stressful circumstances.”




# Hurricane Katrina

In a small group session with the school social worker, a third grade boy wrote;

“Wobbly legs,” “heart pounding,”  
and he drew a rodent by his foot.





Two important research findings support the establishment of family literacy initiatives to overcome the impact of COVID-19 and other catastrophes and disasters.

The first finding is that the social fabric of children's everyday lives must be restored if children and their families are to have the best chance possible to recover when catastrophic events take place.



The second finding is that children and their families need to experience joy if they are going to have the best chance possible to recover from trauma.





**Using Literacy to  
Create Webs of Caring  
in Families, Schools  
and Communities**



**Organizing Family  
Literacy Nights for  
Students and Their  
Families**



Teachers are first responders when disasters impact the lives of children and their families.

Medical research supports the establishment of caring communities and classrooms filled with joyful experiences so that children can become more resilient, confident and secure in a post-COVID-19 world.





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Making  
Something  
Out of  
Nothing

LYST  
261  
WRITING  
PICTURES  
STORIES

Character  
DREAM  
BIG  
JUST  
IMAGINE  
PEACE  
Faith

BE HAPPY  
FOR THIS MOMENT

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WRITING  
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THE  
PICTURE

Writing  
Respons



Staying home  
is staying safe

I know now going to school  
is not that bad.  
Missing my friends and  
teachers make me feel sad

But to stay safe we  
must stay home  
I can still see my  
my family and friends  
thru my phone

Exploring nature near  
my home. Staying apart  
but we are not alone

When this is over we  
can all smile because  
we haven't seen each  
other in a while  
we will finally be back  
together and our love for each  
other will stay for ever  
by Ava May John

NHS



## Ava

**Our task is to create webs of caring in which children can share their knowledge of the world gained from reading, writing and personal experience.**



Ava's video reminds us that in families literacy events are deeply contextualized and texts are not always visible.

Ava writes "I have lots of books about climate change so I am learning more and more," and it is these books that have informed her video.





COVID-19 not only creates the conditions for a global reading lesson, the virus also creates the conditions for great transformations in all human societies.



We have learned that families can share experiences on a planetary scale and together we can create a common language that is understood wherever we live.

Our task now is to take this universally shared experience and use it for the common good and build a better world.