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And How Are the Children? Lockdowns, Massive Fear, Deaths from Suicides and Drug Abuse

By Christine E. Black
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"Casserian Engeri?" translated from the Maasai language means, "And how are the children?" This is a traditional greeting among a Maasai tribe in Africa. One hoped to hear, "Sepati Ingera!" which means, "The children are well." A good indicator of the health of a society is the health of its children.

Sadly, in the U. S. now, with the former Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Director Robert Redfield saying publicly in July 2020 that deaths from suicides and drug overdoses among high school students far outweighed their deaths from Covid and failures among school children, especially high school students, is at epidemic levels, the answer to this question would have to be,

"No. The children are not well. Not well at all." And I am astounded by the lack of outcry among most of our public officials.

For more than a year now, children and teens have been robbed of most of what gives their lives value and meaning – seeing their friends at school, club meetings, church groups, camps, family gatherings, singing groups, playing with school bands and orchestras. Some schools have continued sports programs, but many have not, sometimes with heartbreaking consequences, such as the death by suicide of Dylan Buckner, age 18, as reported in the April 21 edition of *The Epoch Times*. Dylan's father, Chris, said he is certain that his state, Illinois', school closures and extended stay-at-home orders worsened his son's mental health and contributed to his death. Dylan had a 4.7 grade point average, loved playing football, which his father said helped him keep a structured routine, according to the article, "The Cost of Lockdowns." He was on his way to college with football scholarships. And yet this year, the school system cancelled the football program because of fears of Covid. Dylan attempted suicide in September 2020 and succeeded in ending his life in January 2021.

For more than a year, fearful adults and misguided politicians have discouraged children and teens from getting together with friends and from living their lives normally. Child development experts agree that peer relationships are among the most important to teens' mental and emotional health. How could we have done this to a nation of children? For a virus that even former CDC Director James Redfield said poses almost no risk to them. He has said that the flu is 5 to 10 times more dangerous to children and that they have a 1 in a

million chance of dying from Covid.

Early death projections from the virus have been shown to be overstated and terribly wrong. Yet, most politicians have not publicly issued retractions and corrections to calm fears and help people, especially children, resume normal lives. Instead, they let the fear-mongering and harm remain.

In March 2020, at the start of the pandemic, politicians and bureaucrats stated publicly that children could infect their parents or grandparents with Covid, even if the child had no symptoms. Members of the Coronavirus Task Force, said that children, teens, and young people, just by living their normal lives – socializing with friends, playing sports, attending school events and parties – could unknowingly catch and then carry the virus to older family members and possibly cause death — even if the young person was not sick, even if they did not have so much as a sniffle. This was called "asymptomatic spread," one of the many bizarre terms we have been forced to learn and think about for more than a year now.

Politicians and bureaucrats stood at the U.S. White House podium at the start of this crisis and said that after infecting an older family member and perhaps causing sickness leading to death, a child would "have to live with that."

What a devastating, harmful, and irresponsible thing to say within hearing of children, teens, and young adults – that they could be a danger to others merely by breathing, by being, by living their normal lives. What an especially horrible and harmful thing to say when we were not even sure it was true. It sounded unbelievable from the start. And it turns out that it was not true. Dr. Maria Van Kerkhove, head of the World Health Organization's (WHO) emerging diseases and zoonosis unit, said at a June 7, 2020 press conference that from the known research, "asymptomatic spread was very rare".

A more recent Chinese study of 10 million people, published in *Nature* magazine found that asymptomatic spread was not only rare but almost non-existent. (See this). On November 22, 2020, Jeffrey A. Tucker published a comprehensive article on the American Institute for Economic Research web site, tracing information on asymptomatic spread over the past year. (See this)

When I read Tucker's article and then the study published in *Nature* magazine, I wondered: where are our elected officials now? Where are those same high-paid politicians, bureaucrats, and public health authorities who had touted these terrible and alarming messages that had so comprehensively devastated the lives of young people for more than a year? Why were they not retracting these statements about asymptomatic spread, reassuring children, teens, and young adults that it is simply is not a worry. That they, just by living their lives and being themselves, are not and never were "super spreaders," are not automatic disease carriers. Why were officials not issuing calming and strengthening messages to young people – after more and different information on this virus has emerged? Where was the outcry to protect the mental and emotional health and academic lives of young people, especially teenagers?

Another article by Micha Gartz for the American Institute for Economic Research reminds us that the median age for death from this virus is 80 years old. Most people who contract the virus recover at home, while many become only mildly ill. Harm to communities from widespread lockdowns has been very real, however. The Crisis Text Line, a non-profit

organization that provides free mental health texting to people in crisis, received 180,00 texts in November 2020, their largest number ever, Gartz notes in her article. (More "Covid Suicides" than Covid Deaths in Kids – AIER)

Even strong students, who have historically earned good grades, have been failing classes at alarming levels during school this past year's school shut downs and predominantly online classes, according to published studies, including one from Fairfax County Public Schools, one of the largest school districts in the U.S. (See this)

Parents, who had previously heeded advice from groups like the American Academy of Pediatrics' to limit children and teen's screen time, for their health, to a maximum of two hours of quality content per day, have now succumbed to allowing their children to spend several hours per day on computers while missing friends, failing classes, and losing hope. Too much computer time can be a health hazard to young people, especially those who may be vulnerable to addiction. In 2019, the WHO listed computer gaming addiction as a disease, one that harms children, teens and young adults mostly. How are the children? Not well at all.

Lockdowns, massive fear, and school shutdowns have had a devastating effect on children and teens' health. A national independent non-profit organization called Fair Health that studies health care costs, reported in March 2021 a 333 percent increase in intentional self-harm claims among young people ages 12 – 18 from the period August 2019 to August 2020. The study, The Impact of COVID-19 on Pediatric Mental Health: A Study of Private Healthcare Claims, analyzed 32 billion private health care claims. Claims have also increased dramatically for overdoses, obsessive compulsive disorders, depression, and anxiety among children 12 – 18, according to the study. The CDC reported over the summer of 2020 that 25 percent of young adults, ages 18 – 25 had seriously considered suicide. (See this).

Many experts have said publicly that lockdowns, including school closures, have been a disastrous and unnecessary mitigation strategy, causing immeasurable harms and countless deaths. Dr. Jay Battacharya, Professor at Stanford University Medical School, called the lockdowns, "the biggest public health mistake we've ever made" in a March 2021 *Newsweek* article. Battacharya is one of the authors of a petition called The Great Barrington Declaration, published in October of 2020, which calls for safety strategies for older people while calling for an end to lockdowns of whole societies, stating that lockdowns cause far more harm than benefit. "Keeping children out of school is a grave injustice," states the declaration, which has been signed by 14,000 medical and public health scientists, 43,000 medical practitioners, and almost 800,000 citizens. Dr. Martin Kulldorff, Professor of Medicine at Harvard University and Dr. Sunetra Gupta, Professor at Oxford University are also authors of the petition.

Many studies now published show that states that remined opened for the past year fared no worse, and some better, than states that had the most restrictive closures and shutdowns. Further, there have been treatments for this virus, all along, such as Hydroxychloroquine and Ivermectin that, if given early, could have saved tens of thousands of lives, according to many sources. Dr. Peter McCollough spoke before Congress on early treatment and on the criminal silencing of doctors, including preventing doctors from treating Covid patients with drugs that work. These drugs were instead politicized with doctors barred from prescribing them. (Senate Hearing on COVID-19 Outpatient Treatment | C-SPAN.org) With more courage and independent thinking, fear and harm could have been

contained; instead many simply stood by and watched the light go out in children's eyes, month after month for more than a year.

Children in sports have been made to wear masks though masks deplete oxygen and may impede focus and cause more accidents, some parents have complained, while professional athletes on TV do not have to wear them. While many schools have reopened to in-person classes, government-created school re-opening documents, with the repressive six-feet apart, sanitizing, and mask mandates, read almost like manuals for operating a concentration camp. I have taught in a prison, and these public school re-opening plans read and feel more repressive than conditions inside a prison. I have seen children in school this past year eating, spaced six feet from one another, only allowed to remove the mask to eat and not being permitted to eat with their friends. I can hardly keep from crying seeing them this way. School rooms and cafeterias these days look like more like rooms where children are sent to serve detention. Students look like they are being punished when they have done nothing wrong. How can this be? How can we remain silent?

Some students may feel so depressed with these conditions that they do not even want to attend school. It can be almost overwhelmingly sad to not see human faces and smiles for extended periods. For years, teachers have studied and promoted the importance of children's social and emotional learning, and now we expect children to attend schools like look and feel like prison camps. Or worse. How can we treat our children this way?

We want to believe that the information we receive about this virus is unbiased and nonpartisan — especially if government mandates have affected children and young adults so severely. Surely the measures must have been neutral and necessary. But sadly, information we receive is not unbiased; we have to keep questioning, reading, listening, and thinking. Writer and researcher Dr. Namoi Wolf notes that the CDC created a foundation to receive money from big pharmaceutical companies, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and from technology companies that profit from online education.

While some politicians and high-paid bureaucrats still promote fear, panic, and paranoia, others have begun speaking up on failed lockdown policies. In an April 21 *Epoch Times* article, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis said that elected officials, establishment media, and Big Tech have been to blame for perpetuating fears and selectively censoring one side of the mitigation debate. Why? Because they have made money off the fear, panic, and paranoia. "Media and big tech giants benefitted from lockdowns as people stayed home and consumed their products," DeSantis said. Google removed videos of DeSantis talking to doctors who criticized failed lockdown policies. "Google and YouTube have been throughout this crisis censors in service of the ruling elite," he said. While millions of people lost their businesses or jobs, and school children, teens, and young people struggled with despair, loneliness, and school failures, 614 U.S. billionaires increased their wealth by 931 billion dollars, according to a December 1, 2020, *USA Today* article. (During coronavirus pandemic, billionaires added $931B to net worth (usatoday.com)

For the health of our communities and our children, we have to keep rising above fear, confusion, paranoia, and even shame and guilt for getting the virus response so wrong. We have to keep returning the question, "And how are the children?" And if the children are not well, we must change course to stop harming them while working diligently to mitigate the harms that have already been done.

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