

*This handout is adapted from interviews posted on the HOPE blog, “Love in the Time of Covid-19: Inequities and Supporting Children” with Dr. Danielle Laraque-Arena, and “Justice is Love: Fatherhood and Equity during COVID-19” with Corey Best.*

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# 4

## Building Blocks of HOPE



Guest Post



Dr. Danielle  
Laraque-Arena

**“There needs to be  
fundamental justice in  
support of opportunities for  
us all to live healthy lives.”**

**Excerpt from interview with Dr. Danielle  
Laraque-Arena, published 4/6/20**

**<https://positiveexperience.org/love-in-the-time-of-covid-19-inequities-and-supporting-children/>**

*This excerpt is based on an interview with HOPE National Advisory Board member Dr. Danielle Laraque-Arena about how the pandemic affects children’s environments, and offers some much-needed guidance and resources. Visit the original post at the URL above for the full post and links to video snippets of the interview.*

Dr. Danielle Laraque-Arena is a senior scholar-in-residence at the New York Academy of Medicine. She is a pediatrician, professor and president emerita at SUNY Upstate Medical University, and an adjunct professor of epidemiology at Columbia University. Her perspective comes as a member of the healthcare profession, as a mother, and as a grandmother.

### ***How does Covid-19 highlight existing inequities?***

Thank you for inviting me to speak of Love in the Time of Covid-19. I want to start with a positive message. Bob Sege, in putting together the HOPE Initiative – Health Outcomes from Positive Experiences – is framing what many of us have done in our careers and communities –looking at the positive experiences that support children. I believe that this strength-based approach is needed at all times, but especially at times of crisis. The positive message for us today is: we are one world and our collective actions will demonstrate to children and teens that they are not alone and that there is hope. Issues of the 21st century have underscored the necessity for this perspective with climate change, global markets, globalization, and infections with global impact becoming the urgent problems of the day.

While the Covid-19 pandemic seems to have disproportionately affected those who are vulnerable (e.g. older adults, those with chronic conditions or immune deficiency), it has also shown us that anyone can be affected. We have a civic and social responsibility to care for each other. That’s a lesson I hope we retain as we go through this, because people’s best efforts come out during crises, but we do have short term memories. We forget that these principles are true all the time, not just during crises. Let’s not forget the love at the end of this. And it is particularly important for children. But yes, the Covid-19 pandemic does uncover basic inequities in our health care system and broader societal opportunities. Let me name a few.

## Inequities exacerbated by Covid-19

**Access to Care:** Good health and wellbeing, one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), is achieved in part through universal health coverage. The elimination of health inequities is facilitated by universal access to basic and specialty health services. And, the SDGs have also called our attention to the many social and political determinants of health, such as poverty.

A majority of the US healthcare system has tied health insurance to employment. At the time of this interview, we have over three million [Americans] who have claimed unemployment benefits in the advent of this pandemic, putting into jeopardy their access to health care. How does that affect our ability to provide them health-related services? Do they have disposable cash to take on additional burdens? Do we have a healthcare system that attends to all? We're not all the same. But there needs to be fundamental justice in support of opportunities for us all to live healthy lives.

**Poverty:** In New York, the governor has said that no landlord can oust someone from their home during this pandemic. This is a positive measure but calls attention to the housing risks faced by many families who survive paycheck to paycheck. Many of our schoolchildren qualify for free breakfast and lunch – so food insecurity becomes even more apparent during the full-scale closure of schools. We're dealing with poverty, economic injustices, lack of jobs, and of course, educational inequities based on zip codes. Current gaps in educational achievement may be exacerbated by this pandemic – e.g. due to lack of access to digital platforms, the stresses on already stressed educational systems, and the stresses placed on families at this moment of crisis.

**Climate Considerations:** We know that poorer communities are disproportionately affected by climate change and environmental degradation. There have been decreases in pollution being reported in Europe as a result of Covid-19. Isn't that amazing? And cleaner water in Venice, Italy. Can we retain some of the corollary benefits of a slower society, as evidenced by the conditions calling upon us to use our technological capabilities in different ways, to benefit work conditions and the environment? We may not want to return to business as usual when the pandemic is over. Surely a cleaner world will benefit our children.

# 4 Building Blocks of HOPE



Guest Post



Corey Best

"We do nothing alone, and if we truly care about the positive outcomes in our community, we will begin by recognizing that we have a lot of power to transmit hope to another individual."

Excerpt from interview with Corey Best, published 5/5/20

<https://positiveexperience.org/justice-is-love-fatherhood-and-equity-during-covid-19/>

This excerpt is based on an interview with HOPE National Advisory Board member Corey Best, a member of the Birth Parent National Network (BPNN) | CTF Alliance, which "promotes and champions birth parents as leaders and strategic partners in prevention and child welfare systems reform." Visit the URL above for the full post.

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### *How can parents talk with their children about inequities?*

When it comes to disparities, I break it down as simply as I can: that we want things to be proportionate. I try to not use language that goes over his head and present it in ways where I help him analyze the “why’s” behind [disparities]. He’s asked, “Why do more black and brown people get sick from Covid?” I go back to segregation, [effects of] socioeconomic status, access to health[care]. There’s certain privileges to being in dominant culture that doesn’t exist for black and brown people.

The best way that I’ve seen, for him to really understand it, is when I talk about difference. I tell him that, at the core, it’s hard for people to embrace difference, and when we can see difference, embrace difference and accept people for their differences, that is love through justice. I would advise any parent to first understand where they are when it comes to racism-induced disparities, and to not shy away from conversations with children. I don’t think any child is too young to learn about our world. All of us are bombarded with our own level of biases. To live with a deep understanding of what your biases are is also to prevent discrimination.

I also let him know that what I’m teaching is not meant for him to dislike anybody, it’s for him to understand his racial identity, his socialization, to equip him with skills that prepare him for discriminatory acts and to stand for something meaningful. He asked me why I do this work, and quite honestly, I tell him, I don’t have to. I don’t have to speak for justice, because many of the people that I am attempting to advocate for, I may never meet. That’s truly love. Justice is love.

### *Who do you advocate for, and how has your advocacy changed due to Covid?*

Pre-Covid and during, I feel that equity is a process and also an outcome, for groups of people who are considered marginal, disenfranchised. I don’t share these beliefs—these are words, that the government has given me to use to classify groups of people, and I value humanity. A part of my advocacy, when it comes to relationship building, is to recognize that some of our approaches are cookie cutter. Some of our approaches ask individuals to be perfect. These things are all to achieve objective measures of a larger system. The current system’s measure of success have nothing to do with how we feel, think, pray or what our values are.

My core “why” may be different than systems. I don’t clock out from being black. I live and experience racism differently than human beings in white bodies. When it comes to leveling the playing field, the advocacy begins with understanding that the field was never level to begin with, and that design gives us harmful ideologies, racist ideas and beliefs, that have been attached to us. It’s less about skin color or racial identity, and it’s more about what we’ve attached to skin color and racial identity.

Covid is one more example of how we, people of color, live with a threat. We’ve learned to live with the weight of stereotype threat, that weight of potential harm to our physical beings, the threat of discrimination, of aggressions. My “why” for my child is not for a quantitative set of outcomes. My “why” is out of his safety. He’s going to grow up in a world that may see him as a threat.

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