My Hero is You

how kids can fight COVID-19!

IASC

Inter-Agency Standing Committee

The making of "My Hero is You"

This book was a project developed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings (IASC MHPSS RG). The project was supported by global, regional and country based experts from Member Agencies of the IASC MHPSS RG, in addition to parents, caregivers, teachers and children in 104 countries. A global survey was distributed in Arabic, English, Italian, French and Spanish to assess children's mental health and psychosocial needs during the COVID-19 outbreak. A framework of topics to be addressed through the story was developed using the survey results. The book was shared through storytelling to children in several countries affected by COVID-19. Feedback from children, parents and caregivers was then used to review and update the story.

Over 1,700 children, parents, caregivers and teachers from around the world took the time to share with us how they were coping with the COVID-19 pandemic. A big thank you to these children, their parents, caregivers and teachers for completing our surveys and influencing this story. This is a story developed for and by children around the world.

This IASC MHPSS RG acknowledge Helen Patuck for writing the story script and illustrating this book.

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Introduction

"My Hero is You" is a book written for children around the world affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"My Hero is You" should be read by a parent, caregiver or teacher alongside a child or a small group of children. It is not encouraged for children to read this book independently without the support of a parent, caregiver or teacher. The supplementary guide called "Actions for Heroes" (to be published later) offers support for addressing topics related to COVID-19, helping children manage feelings and emotions, as well as supplementary activities for children to do based on the book.

Translations

The Reference Group itself will coordinate translation into Arabic, Chinese French, Russian, and Spanish. Contact the IASC Reference Group for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) (mhpss.refgroup@gmail.com) for coordination of translations in other languages. All completed translations will be posted on the IASC Reference Group website.

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Sara's mum is her hero because she is the best mum *and* the best scientist in the world. But even Sara's mum cannot find a cure for the coronavirus.

"What does COVID-19 look like?" Sara asked her mum.

"COVID-19, or the coronavirus, is so tiny we can't see it," said her mum. "But it spreads in the coughs and sneezes of people who are sick, and when they touch people or things around them. People who are sick get a fever and a cough and can have some trouble breathing."

"So we can't fight it because we can't see it?" Sara asked.

"We can fight it," said Sara's mum. "That's why I need you to be safe, Sara. The virus affects many kinds of people, and everyone can help us fight it. Children are special and they can help too. You need to stay safe for all of us. I need you to be my hero."

Sara laid in bed that night and did not feel like a hero at all. She felt upset. She wanted to go to school but her school was closed. She wanted to see her friends but it was not safe. Sara wanted the coronavirus to stop scaring her world.

“Heroes have super powers” she said to herself, closing her eyes to sleep. “What do I have?”

Suddenly a gentle voice whispered her name in the darkness.

“Who’s there?” Sara whispered back.

“What do you need to be a hero, Sara?” the voice asked her.

“I need a way to tell all the children in the world how to protect themselves so they can protect everyone else...” said Sara.

“So what do you need me to be?” the voice asked.

“I need something that can fly... something with a big voice... and something that can help!”

With a whoosh, something amazing stepped into the moonlight...

“What are you?” gasped Sara.

“I’m Ario,” he said.

“I’ve never seen an Ario before,” said Sara.

“Well, I’ve been here all along,” said Ario. “I come from your heart.”

“If I have you… then I can tell all the children in the world about the coronavirus!” said Sara. “I can be a hero! But wait, Ario, is it safe to travel with the coronavirus around?”

“Only with me, Sara,” said Ario. “Nothing can harm you when we are together.”

So Sara jumped on Ario's back and together they soared out through her bedroom window, into the night sky. They flew towards the stars and said hello to the moon.

As the sun rose, they landed in a lovely desert by pyramids, where a small group of children were playing. The children cried out in joy and waved at Sara and her Ario.

“Welcome, I am Salem!” cried one of the boys. “What are you doing here? Sorry, we can’t come closer, we have to stay at least one metre away!”

“That’s why we’re here!” Sara called back. “I’m Sara and this is Ario. Did you know that children can keep their neighbours, friends, parents and grandparents safe from the coronavirus? We all need to…”

“Wash our hands with soap and water!” said Salem with a smile. “We know, Sara. We also cough into our elbows if we’re sick - and we wave to people instead of shaking hands. We try to stay inside, but we live in a very crowded city… not everybody is staying home.”

“Hmm, maybe I can help with that,” said Ario. “They can’t see the coronavirus, but... they can see me! Jump on, but please sit on both sides of my wings - they are at least one metre apart!”

Ario flew into the sky with Salem and Sara on both of his wings. He flew across the city and began to roar and sing! Salem cried out to the children in the streets:

"Go, tell your families, we are safer inside! We can take care of each other best by staying home!"

People were amazed by what they saw. They waved and agreed to go into their houses.

Ario soared high into the sky. Salem cried out in joy. Up there in the clouds a plane flew by, and the passengers looked out at them in awe.

"People will have to stop travelling soon, at least for now," said Salem. "They are closing the borders across the world, and we should all stay where we are and with people we love."

"So many things feel like they have changed," said Sara. "I get scared about it sometimes."

"It can feel scary and confusing when things are changing, Sara," said Ario. "When I feel scared, I breathe very slowly - and breathe out fire!"

Ario blew out a huge fireball!

"How do you relax when you feel scared?" Ario asked them.

“I like to think about someone who makes me feel safe,” said Sara.

“Me too, I think of all the people who help me feel safe, like my grandparents,” said Salem. “I miss them. I can’t give them a hug because I could give them the coronavirus. We usually see them every weekend, but not now because we have to keep them safe.”

“Can you call them?” Sara asked her friend.

“Oh yes!” said Salem. “They call me everyday and I tell them about all the things we are doing at home. It makes me feel better, and it makes them feel better too.”

“It is normal to miss people we love that we can’t see right now,” said Ario. “It shows how much we care. Would it make you feel better to meet other heroes?”

“Yes please!” Sara and Salem cried back.

“Great, my friend Sasha has a very special superpower,” said Ario. “Let’s go!”

And so they soared down to earth and landed by a small village. A girl was outside her house picking flowers. When she saw Ario and the children sitting on his wings, she laughed.

"Ario!" she cried. "We have to stay at least one metre apart, so I will throw you a hug! What are you all doing here?"

"I felt your hug when you told me that, Sasha," said Ario. "I love how we can use words to show we care, and actions too. I wanted my friends to learn about your superpower."

"What is my superpower?" said Sasha.

"Since someone in your family got sick, you are staying at home to make sure you don't share the coronavirus with anyone else," said Ario.

"Yes, it's my Dad, and he's staying in his bedroom until he gets completely better," said Sasha.

"But it's not so bad! We play games, cook, spend time in our garden and have meals together. My brothers and I touch our toes and dance. We read books and I can keep learning because sometimes I miss school. Staying home felt weird at first, but now it feels normal."

"That's not always easy, Sasha," said Ario. "You are finding ways to have fun and get along with your loved ones at home. That makes you my hero!"

"Do you ever fight with your family?" asked Salem.

"We fight sometimes," said Sasha. "We have to be extra patient, and extra understanding, and even quicker to say I'm sorry. That is a real superpower, because it can make ourselves and others feel better. I also need a little time alone. I love dancing and singing on my own! And I can call my friends sometimes..."

"But, Ario, what about people who are far from home or don't have a house?" asked Sara.

"That's a great question, Sara," said Ario. "Let's go and find out."

And so they said goodbye to Sasha and set off once more. The air grew warmer as they landed on an island surrounded by the sea.

There they saw a camp full of people.

One girl saw them and waved from a distance.

“Hi Ario, I’m so happy to see you again!” she called out. “We are trying to stay at least one metre away, so I’ll talk to you from here. But I’d love to meet your friends! My name is Leila.”

“Hi Leila! I’m Sara, and this is Salem,” Sara called back. “It sounds like you’re trying to protect yourself from the coronavirus. What else are you doing?”

“We’re washing our hands with soap and water!” Leila called back.

“Do you also cough into your elbow?” asked Salem.

“Can you show us how?” Leila called back. So Salem showed them.

“We are all trying to be brave, but I am worried about something,” said Leila. “Can I talk about it with you? I heard someone got sick and died and it made me very afraid. Is it true people can die from coronavirus?”

Ario breathed a big sigh and sat down on his enormous bottom.

"Yes, little heroes, it's strange," said Ario. "Some people don't feel sick at all, but some people can be very sick and some might die. That's why we all have to be especially careful with older people, and those with other illnesses, because they tend to get more sick. Sometimes when we are feeling very afraid, or unsafe, it can help to imagine a safe place in our minds. Would you like to try this with me?"

They all said yes, and so Ario asked the children to close their eyes and imagine a place where they feel safe.

"Focus on a memory or a time when you felt safe," said Ario.

He then asked them what they could see, what they could feel, and what they could smell in their safe place. He asked if there was anyone special they would like to invite into their safe place and what they might talk about together.

"You can go to your safe place whenever you feel sad or afraid," said Ario. "This is your super power, and you can share it with your friends and family. And remember that I care about you, and many people do. That will help too."

Leila said, “We can all care for each other.”

“That’s right, Leila,” said Ario. “We can care for each other, wherever we are. Would you like to come with us on our last journey?”

Leila decided to travel with Ario and her new friends. Sara was glad Leila joined them because she knew that sometimes we need to support each other. They flew quietly, without words, but Leila knew her new friends cared a lot about her.

Snowy mountains slowly came into view, and Ario landed in a small town. A few children were playing by a stream.

“Ario!” one of them cried, waving to him.

“Hello, Kim,” said Ario. “Everyone, I wanted you to meet some friends of mine who have had the coronavirus, and got better.”

“What was it like?” Salem asked.

“I was coughing and felt too hot sometimes. I was also really tired and didn’t want to play for a few days,” said Kim. “But I slept a lot and my family took care of me. Some of our parents and grandparents had to go to hospital. The nurses and doctors were very kind to them, and people in our community helped us at home. After a few weeks, we were okay again.”

"I'm Kim's friend," said one of the other children. "Just because Kim had the coronavirus, we didn't stop being friends - even though I could not see him. I never stopped caring about him and we're happy we can play together again!"

"Sometimes the most important thing we can do as friends is protect each other," said Ario. "Even if that means staying away from each other for a while."

“We can do these things for each other,” said Leila.

“And one day, we will all be able to play again and go back to school like we used to,” said Salem.

It was time to go home, and time for Sara to say goodbye to her new friends. They promised each other that they would never forget their adventure together.

Sara felt sad that they might not see each other for a while. But she felt better when she remembered what Kim’s friend had said. Just because you can’t see people, it doesn’t mean you stop loving them.

Ario dropped them all back to their homes, and waited for Sara to fall asleep before he left.

“Can we do the same tomorrow?” Sara asked him.

“No Sara, it’s time for you to be with your family now,” said Ario. “Remember our story. You can keep those you love safe by washing your hands and staying home. I am never far away. You can always be with me when you go to your safe place.”

“You are my hero,” she whispered.

“You are my hero too, Sara. You are a hero to all those who love you,” he said.

Sara fell asleep and when she woke the next day, Ario was gone. So she went to her safe place to talk to him, then drew everything they had seen and learnt on their adventure. She ran to her mum with her drawing to tell her the news.

“We can all help people be safe, Mum,” she said. “I met so many heroes on my adventure!”

“Oh Sara, you are right!” said her mum. “There are many heroes keeping people safe from the coronavirus, like wonderful doctors and nurses. But you remind me that we can all be heroes, every day, and my biggest hero is you.”