



From Zero to Thrive! Connections are the Roots of Literacy and Early Relational Health

Kate Rosenblum, PhD, ABPP, IMH-E
Professor of Psychiatry, OB/Gyn, and
Pediatrics, and Co-Director Zero to Thrive
University of Michigan



1

Personal Reflection

- Take a moment to think about a tree that is special to you. This might be a tree from your childhood, a tree near your home, one you remember, or one you see every day.
- Get comfortable, close your eyes, and take a moment to picture your tree.



2

Reflection

- What made that tree special to you?
- How did thinking about, and mentally “being with,” your tree make you feel?



3



From Strong Roots Rhode Island



4

My Objectives Today

- Share a perspective on the science of early relational health
- Share nature-based metaphors we use with families to promote early relational health
- Discuss the Strong Roots Protective Factors / Five for Families Five Strengths and their role in promoting child, parent, family, and community resilience
- Introduce the "Reading Roots" Parent Café

5

Like the **Roots** of a Tree... Early Relationships are Foundational



6



“In the Western tradition there is a recognized hierarchy of beings, with, of course, the human being on top—the pinnacle of evolution, the darling of Creation—and the plants at the bottom. But in Native ways of knowing, human people are often referred to as ‘the younger brothers of Creation.’ We say that humans have the least experience with how to live and thus the most to learn—we must look to our teachers among the other species for guidance.”

— Robin Wall Kimmerer, author of *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Professor of Botany, and Member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation



7

**WANT MORE? A
WONDERFUL BRAND
NEW CHILDREN’S BOOK
BY THE SAME AUTHOR**



8

Learning from
the Trees.....



M MICHIGAN MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

THRIVE

9



M MICHIGAN MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

THRIVE

10



11



12

Trees Develop and Change Over Time



13



14



15

Trees are Resilient

16



17



18



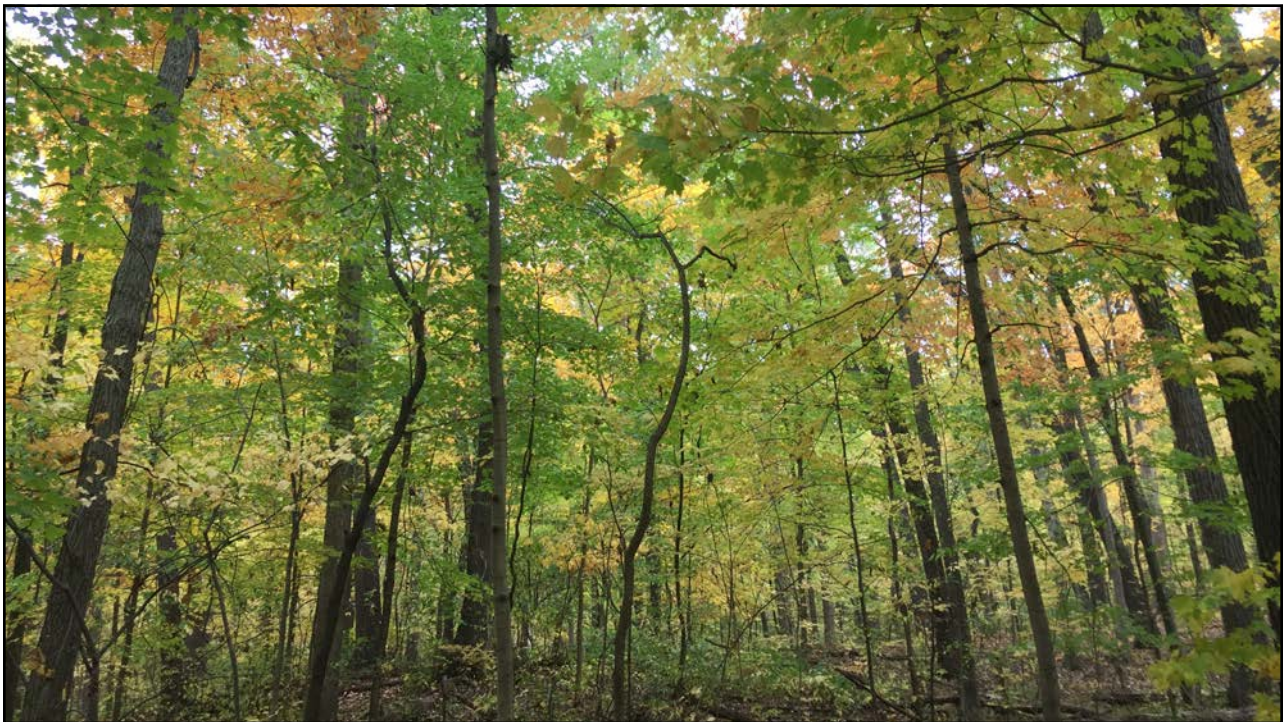
19

Trees Thrive in Communities

20



21



22

So, too, humans...



23



Let's Begin Now with a Shared Understanding

Nurturing and responsive early relationships provide a critical foundation for ALL children

Early relational health can help to protect us in the face of challenges

We can nurture & support relational health

Relationships are deeply culturally embedded and hold unique meaning for each partner, each relationship, each family

zero TO THRIVE.

24



25

***Adversities faced by
families and communities
have multigenerational
impacts... and yet there is
reason for hope!***

26

PARENTS FACE ADVERSITIES

mental health Interpersonal violence
 hopelessness stigma
 lack of resources
 past trauma stress mistrust in providers
 bad provider experience
 ACCESS problem poor social support
 anxiety ongoing trauma no child care
 fear shame
 poverty ISOLATION Childhood Trauma
 Birth trauma Neighborhood violence
 STRUCTURAL RACISM inequity

27

WE ARE LIVING THROUGH ANOTHER EPIDEMIC

Almost 50% of US adults
report feeling lonely

Young adults of childbearing
age report the highest rates

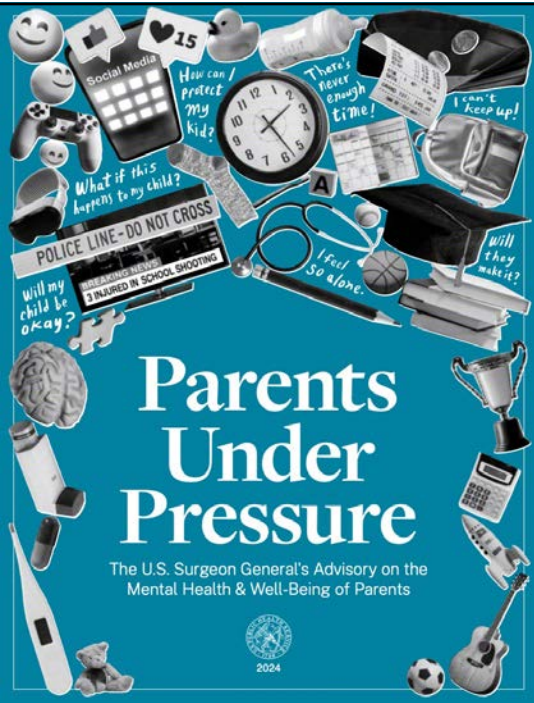
Only 1 in 6 adults report
feeling very socially
connected to their community

Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation 2023

The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the
Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community



28



Parents Under Pressure
The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Mental Health & Well-Being of Parents

ALMOST 1 IN 2 PARENTS REPORT CLINICAL LEVELS OF PARENTING STRESS!
AND LONELINESS IS A BIG RISK FACTOR!

The Detroit News
SERVING MICHIGAN SINCE 1873

OPINION This piece expresses the views of its author(s), separate from those of this publication.

Rosenblum: Take collective action against parenting stress and loneliness

Katherine Rosenblum The Detroit News
Published 8:00 p.m. ET Sept. 9, 2024 | Updated 8:00 p.m. ET Sept. 9, 2024

On August 28, Vivek Murthy, the U.S. Surgeon General, issued a public health advisory calling parental stress a serious health issue, something that I agree with, both as a parent and child psychologist.

29



The good news:
In the work we do.. the evidence confirms the potential for resilience and hope!

4 quick and hopeful lessons from research...

M MICHIGAN MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

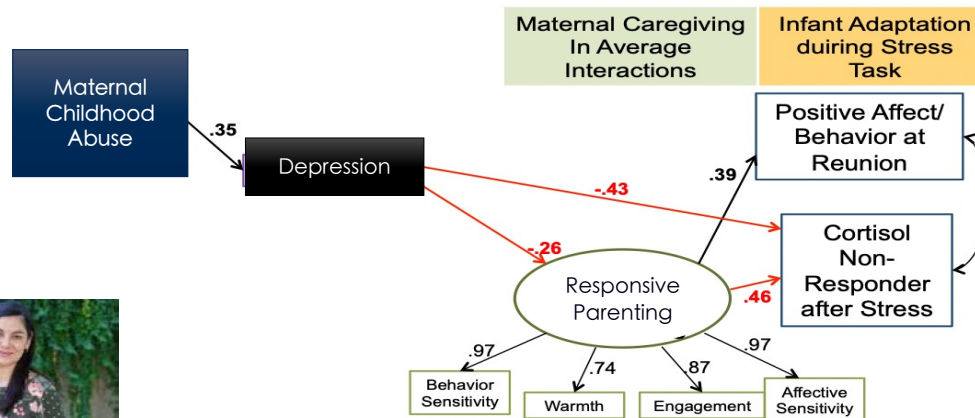
zero TO THRIVE.

30

#1. Even in the face of adversity prior experience is not destiny



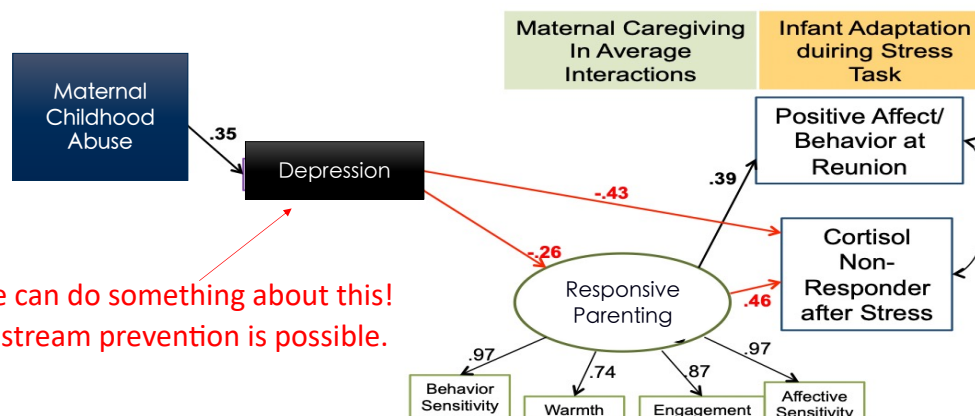
Martinez-Torteya, C, et al., (2014).
Development and Psychopathology, 26(02), 379-392.



31

#1. Even in the face of adversity prior experience is not destiny

We can do something about this!
Upstream prevention is possible.

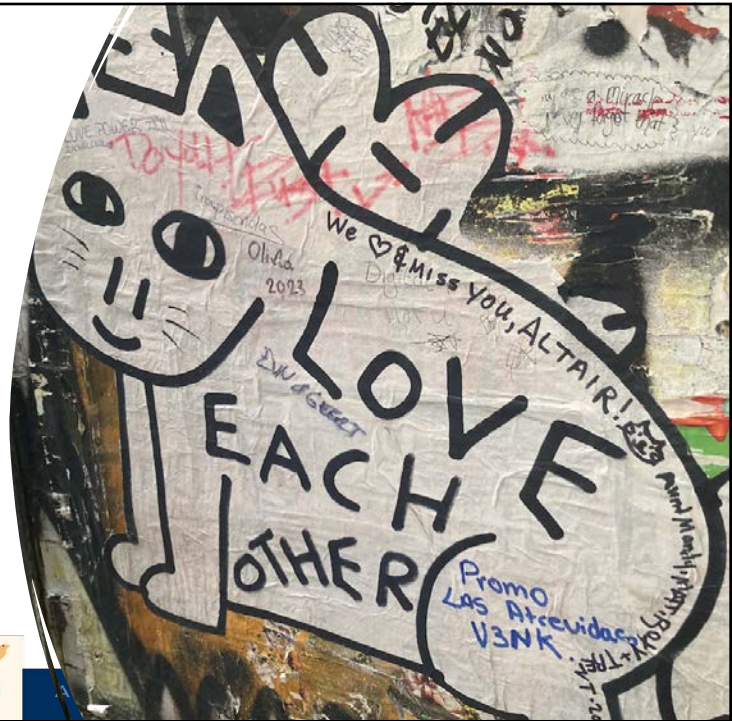


Martinez-Torteya, C, et al., (2014).
Development and Psychopathology, 26(02), 379-392.



32

#2. Positive early relational experiences are protective



zero TO THRIVE

33

Positive early relational experiences predict adult mental and relational health ... and can lessen the impact of ACES!

Research

JAMA Pediatrics | [Original Investigation](#)

Positive Childhood Experiences and Adult Mental and Relational Health in a Statewide Sample Associations Across Adverse Childhood Experiences Levels

Christina Bethell, PhD, MBA, MPH; Jennifer Jones, MSW; Narangerel Gombojav, MD, PhD; Jeff Linkenbach, EdD; Robert Sege, MD, PhD

[Supplemental content](#)

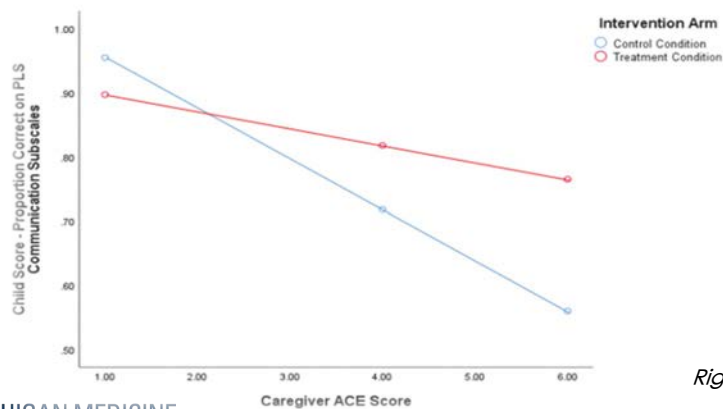
IMPORTANCE Associations between adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and risks for adult depression, poor mental health, and insufficient social and emotional support have been documented. Less is known about how positive childhood experiences (PCEs) co-occur with and may modulate the effect of ACEs on adult mental and relational health.

M MICHIGAN MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

zero TO THRIVE

34

A relationship-focused intervention interrupts the association between maternal ACEs and toddler language development



Riggs, et al., 2022

J Dev Behav Pediatr

M MICHIGAN MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

zero TO THRIVE

35

#3. “good enough” is truly good enough (whew!)

Science News

from research organizations

'Good enough' parenting is good enough, study finds

Date: May 8, 2019

Source: Lehigh University

Summary: Caregivers need only 'get it right' 50 percent of the time when responding to babies' need for attachment to

Share: [f](#) [t](#) [p](#) [in](#)

CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Empirical Article

Secure Base Provision: A New Approach to Examining Links Between Maternal Caregiving and Infant Attachment

Susan S. Woodhouse, Julie R. Scott, Allison D. Hepworth, Jude Cassidy

RELATED TOPICS

Health & Medicine

What really matters in caring for babies may be different

M MICHIGAN MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

zero TO THRIVE

36



Yet even “good enough”
can be harder when families are
coping with stress or adversity

zero TO THRIVE

37

**When I'm feeling overwhelmed
or stressed:**

I can't hear you.

I can't think clearly.

I can't respond to you.

*I need your help to calm me and
feel safe.*

M | MICHIGAN MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

zero TO THRIVE

38

The role of Reflective Parenting: A twist on the impact of reading, singing, and stories on relationships



39

What is Reflective Parenting?



- Ability to recognize feelings
- Ability to perspective take
- Recognizing that internal mental states underlie behavior (feelings, thoughts, beliefs, desires)
- All of which helps parents to make their child's behavior meaning-full

40

Parent Reflectivity is associated with how parents talk with their babies and children (“mind-minded speech”)

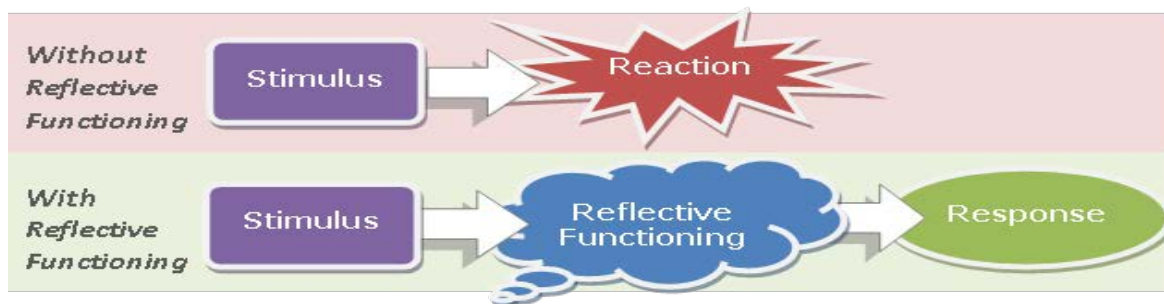


- “You want that ball?” [desire]
- “Do you know where your ball is?” [thought]
- “Do you think it is under the table?” [belief]
- “Are you sad because you don’t have the ball?” [feeling]

Mind-minded speech, even with babies, has been linked to later relational security AND child emotion understanding!

41

How else might parenting reflectivity promote ERH?



42

Why is this important to share here?

Because Reach Out and Read is an early relational health promoting program, *and reading, singing, and telling stories offers opportunities for mind-minded conversations and strengthens reflectivity!*



43

How might this look? (I bet you do this already!)

- Fostering child curiosity
 - “Why do you think [character] did that?”
 - “How do you think [character] felt?”
- Encourages mental state talk and understanding
 - “Oh, she looks mad!”
 - “Why was [character] happy?”
- Fosters parent curiosity about their child’s inner world
 - “How do you feel when [...]?”



44

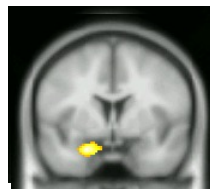


#4 It's never too late

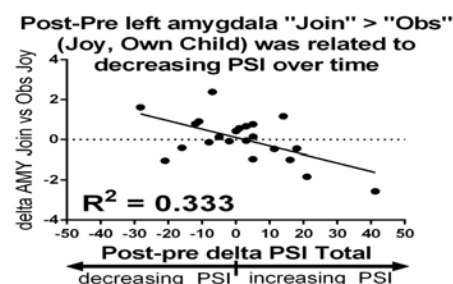
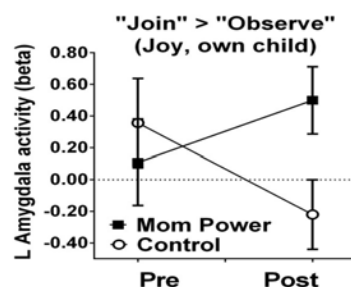
Findings from Strong Roots/ Mom Power Brain Imaging Research

45

Participating in a parenting group (Mom Power) changes the functioning of the parental brain, increases empathy and decreases parenting stress



Swain et al., 2017, PLOS



46

Lessons Learned Summary

- Adversity can have multigenerational effects, ***but early adversity is not destiny***
- ***Relationship-focused support*** (interventions/programs) can interrupt the link between adversity and child outcomes
- ***Parenting reflectivity and mind-minded comments*** are important—and reading, singing and telling stories offers opportunities to engage in these kinds of interactions
- And it's never too late!

47

Strong Roots Programs



48



An Important Note....

- Offering examples from our Strong Roots™ programs simply as illustrations
- We all take many paths towards nurturing, supporting, and strengthening early relational health

49

*Share with someone near you –
what stands out – or - how might
this be relevant to your work?*

50

Why a Tree?

Trees are...

Flexible

Resilient

Grow Strong

Can Survive in Harsh Climates

Can Survive Storms

(but need to focus on the roots to survive)

Can be Transplanted

*(but are more vulnerable and
need extra nurturance and care)*

What else?

51



I like eating
the apples off
it. I can
draw them
rilly good.

52



53

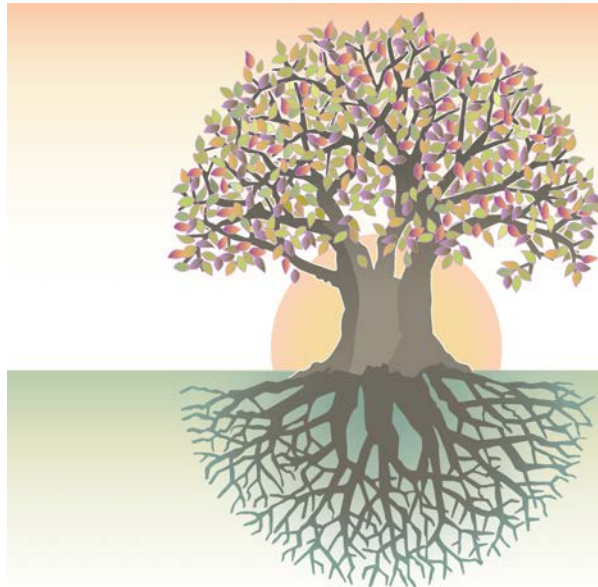


54

From generation to generation..



55



"I didn't have roots growing up in foster care and now I see how important connection is and I want to build roots with my baby"

*Relationships
Build Roots
& Sprout Hope*

56

How do we
support parents
in using
the Tree?

See handout
with QR code



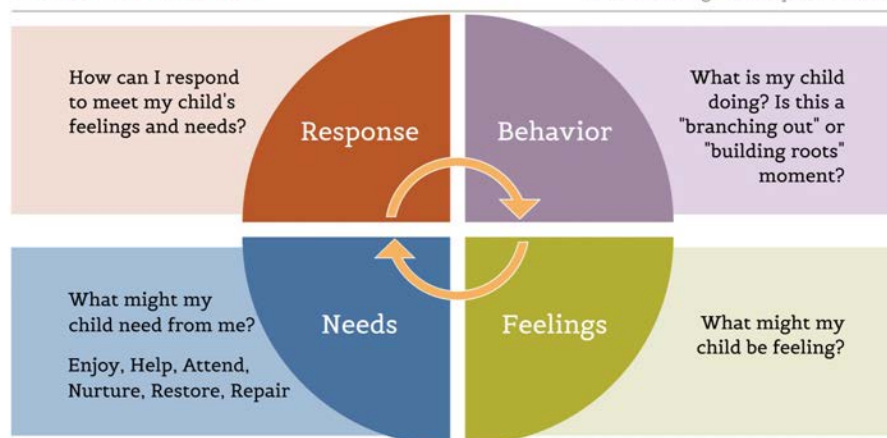
57

Wondering Response Wheel

zero TO THRIVE

MOM POWER

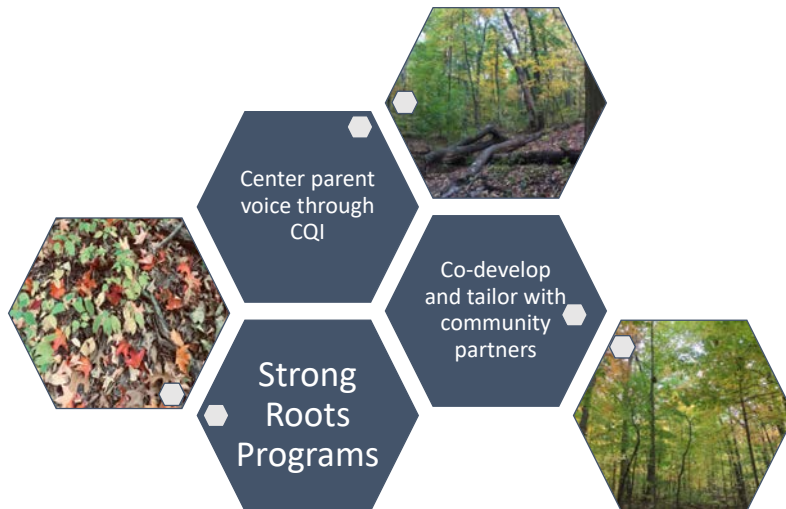
The Wondering and Response Wheel



If you are interested in this, there is a free video at zerotothrive.org

58

Developing the Strong Roots Programs

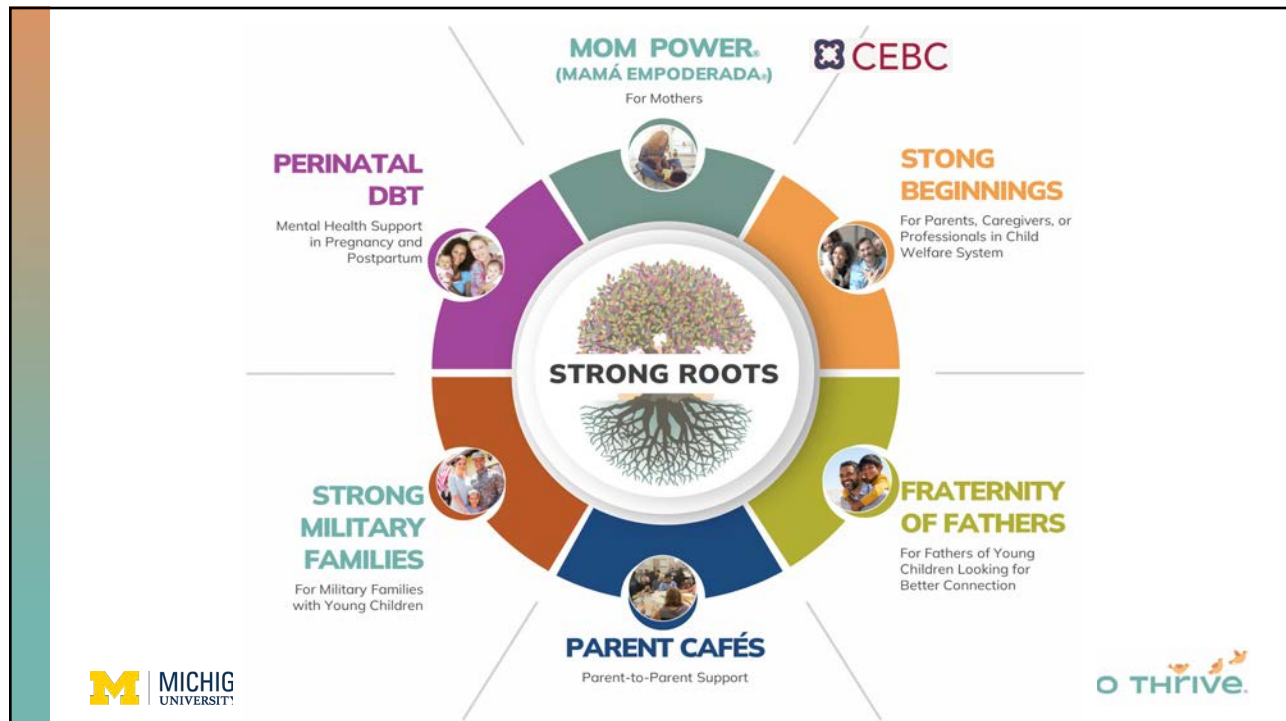


59

Ashared VISION

A world of socially-connected communities, where
every parent has a place to go
 to connect with other parents and
 offer & receive meaningful support

60



61

Strong Roots Protective Factors

-  Caring for Myself
-  Connecting with My People
-  Enjoying with My Child
-  Getting Help
-  Supporting Feelings

62

MOM POWER



AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION



- EB-intervention for moms with embedded child curriculum
- Multigenerational therapy that strengthens positive caregiving relationships
- 12-weeks, 13-session theory-driven treatment
- Led by licensed therapist
- Integrated mental health and parenting curriculum



63

Arch Womens Ment Health (2017) 20:673–686
Download 307600737-017-0734-9



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

A community-based randomized controlled trial of Mom Power parenting intervention for mothers with interpersonal trauma histories and their young children

Katherine L. Rosenblum^{1,2} · Maria Muzik^{1,2} · Diana M. Morelen³ · Emily A. Alfafara¹ · Nicole M. Miller¹ · Rachel M. Waddell¹ · Melisa M. Schuster⁴ · Julie Ribaud⁵

Child Psychiatry Hum Dev. 2018 June ; 49(3): 372–384. doi:10.1007/s10578-017-0757-5.

Improving Maternal Representations in High-Risk Mothers: Randomized, Controlled Trial of the Mom Power Parenting Intervention

Katherine Rosenblum, PhD^{a,b,*}, Jamie Lawler, PhD^a, Emily Alfafara, BA^a, Nicole Miller, LMSW^a, Melisa Schuster, LMSW^c, and Maria Muzik, MD, MS^{a,b,*}

Randomized pilot trial of the “Mom Power” trauma- and attachment-informed multi-family group intervention in treating and preventing postpartum symptoms of depression among a health disparity sample

frontiers Frontiers in Psychiatry

TYPE Brief Research Report
PUBLISHED 05 September 2023
DOI 10.3389/fpsy.2023.1048511

Jennifer M. Jester, Jessica L. Riggs, Rena A. Menke, Emily Alfafara, Meriam Issa, Maria Muzik^a and Katherine L. Rosenblum^{a,*}
*CORRESPONDENCE

- Reduced parent depression and PTSD
- Reduced parenting stress
- Reduced social isolation
- Increased parenting reflectivity
- 5x more likely to connect to resources
- Improved child outcomes

64



STRONG ROOTS PARENT CAFÉ

 MICHIGAN MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

 zero TO THRIVE

65

Strengthening Protective Factors



A Program of  MICHIGAN MEDICINE

- Supporting feelings
- Enjoying with my child
- Connecting with my people
- Caring for myself
- Getting help



- Feelings Matter
- Thoughtful Parenting
- Strong Connections
- Inner Strength
- Practical Help

 MICHIGAN MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

 zero TO THRIVE

66

Strong Roots Parent Cafés

- Small group peer-led conversations
- Using a card deck with questions to prompt reflection and nurture conversation
- Questions specifically focus on pregnancy, infancy, toddlerhood, and early childhood
- Card decks in English, Spanish, and Arabic



67

STRONG ROOTS PARENT CAFÉ

- Questions co-created with parents to nurture conversations around protective factors
- Pilot study (under review) suggests strong feasibility, acceptability, and reported improvement in caring for self and connecting with child
- (read the circled question- parents generated questions that empower parents!)



68

SR Parent Café Community-based Pilot Study

- Evaluated the feasibility, acceptability, and perceived efficacy of SRPCs delivered by parents in community-based settings
- N=93, but n's here vary because they only reported on the Protective Factors they discussed in a specific café
- Almost all children enrolled in Medicaid, racially/ethnically diverse

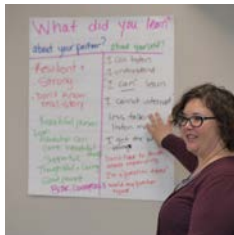


Funding from Zero to Thrive, the Washtenaw County Mental Health Millage, and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services through the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

Barb Durán et al., under review



69



Meet our Zero to Thrive Strong Roots Café Training Institute trainers...

Right to Left-Colleen Klus, Kavitha Lobo, Angela Johnson, Najma Treadwell, Althea Wilson, Kristyn VanDahm, & Rachel Waddell



70

What did we learn?

- Feedback from parents by each protective factor/strength

71

Enjoying with My Child/ Thoughtful Parenting



- We call time spent together with your child in enjoyable activities “Sunshine Time”.
- These do not have to be “big moments” of excitement and joy—even small, or quiet moments, like when your child “helps” you cook, reading a book before bedtime, going on a walk, are opportunities to delight in your child and your relationship.

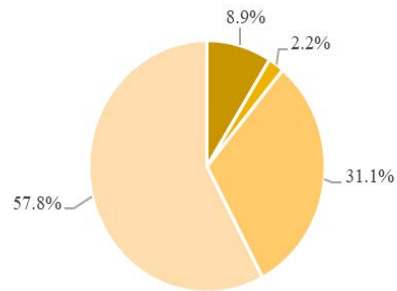


72



Enjoying with my Child / Thoughtful Parenting

This experience helped me learn about how I can
enjoy activities with my child.



■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

73

Caring for Myself Inner Strength



- Just like a flower, we need care to blossom and thrive. But in life it doesn't always just rain on us, and so sometimes we have to water ourselves.
- This can look a lot of different ways—watering our mind, body, and spirit – giving ourselves the hydration we need to be healthy and strong.

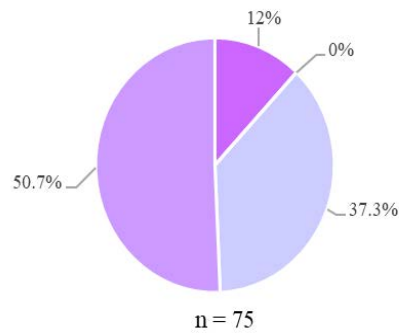


74



Caring for Myself / Inner Strength

Today, I learned about different ways I can care for myself as the caregiver of a young child.



75

Getting Help / Practical Help

- We are all on a journey of growing, but sometimes we are more tender, and can use extra care.
- In those moments we might need people beyond our friends and family to offer us emotional support, or more tangible help, like referrals to resources that could be helpful to us or our children and family. In those moments, we are seeking help that will elevate us, and help us to thrive.

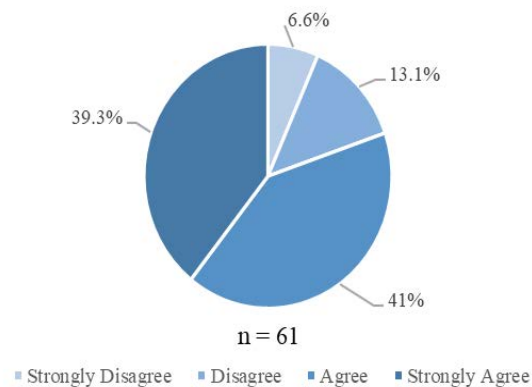


76



Getting Help/Practical Help

I learned about a community resource or professional that I didn't know about before.



77

Connecting with My People Strong Connections (keep this one in mind for today!)



- Just as our children's needs can be represented by the Tree, so can ours, and trees are stronger, more protected, and more resilient when they grow in a grove or a forest. In that setting, tree roots can interconnect, and help hold one another stable.

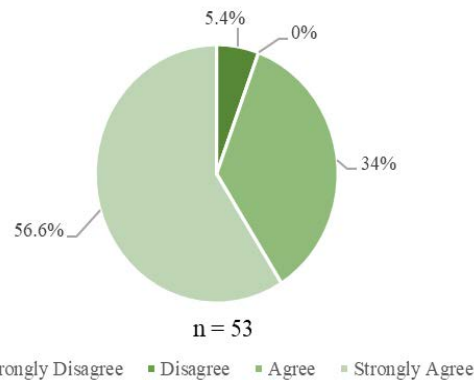


78



Connecting with my People / Strong Connections

I had a chance to think about ways I can improve the support I receive from my people/community.

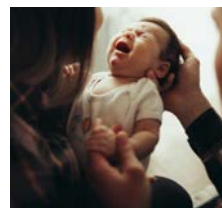


79



Supporting Feelings

- This is represented by an adult and child holding hands. Children have lots of feelings, and they need our support as they navigate all the feelings life brings! When we recognize and support their feelings it lets them know their feelings matter, and helps learn to recognize, express, and cope with emotions. This helps our children be resilient and thrive.

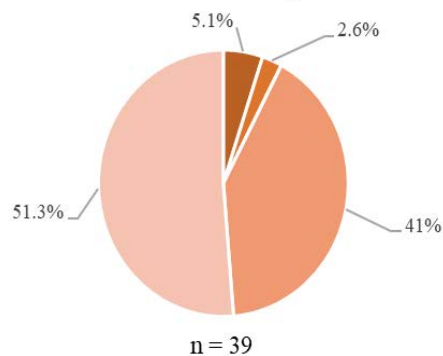


80



Supporting Feelings / Feelings Matter

I learned about different ways I can support my child's feelings.



Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

81

Promoting Reflection & Connection:

The “Reading Roots” Parent Cafés



82

This, too, has been a story of relationships...

- Reach Out and Read:
 - Michigan Medicine
 - **Wisconsin Reach Out and Read**
- Wisconsin Child Abuse & Prevention Board
- Children's Museums and Public Libraries in Michigan and Wisconsin
- Washtenaw Intermediate School District
- Michigan Department of Health and Human Services
- Parents, Families, and more



83

		
 CARING FOR MYSELF How can reading a book help promote your own well being?	<i>Card decks with questions to promote reflection & connection</i>	 CARING FOR MYSELF What are song lyrics that have helped soothe you?
 CONNECTING WITH MY PEOPLE What are some stories that capture being part of your community?		 CONNECTING WITH MY PEOPLE What are some books or stories from your childhood that you have shared or plan to share with your children?
 ENJOYING WITH MY CHILD What are some of the books or stories my child and I enjoy most and why?		 ENJOYING WITH MY CHILD What are some of the ways you encourage reading in your household?
 GETTING HELP What are some ways books can be a resource when you want help?		 GETTING HELP Who helps you think of ideas about reading with your child?
 SUPPORTING FEELINGS How do you think stories and books can help children share and understand their feelings?		 SUPPORTING FEELINGS How do you think stories and books can help children understand their feelings?

84





CARING FOR MYSELF

What are song lyrics that have helped soothe you?



CONNECTING WITH MY PEOPLE

What are some books or stories from your childhood that you have shared or plan to share with your children?



ENJOYING WITH MY CHILD

What are some of the ways you encourage reading in your household?



GETTING HELP

Who helps you think of ideas about reading with your child?



SUPPORTING FEELINGS

How do you think stories and books can help children understand their feelings?

Pick a question, think about it, then share



85

Next Steps with Reading Roots Cafés

- Expansion – training more café hosts
- Evaluation – in Wisconsin and Michigan
- Integration of a Digital Media literacy focus (collaboration with DBP Drs. Tiffany Munzer, Lauren O’Connell, and Jenny Radesky)
- More rigorous empirical testing





86

43

Mental states, reflectivity, and digital media

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yn8j4XRxSck>



87

Families connecting, reading,
singing, and telling stories is a
seed planted for the current and
future health of...

the child,

the relationship,

and our whole forest community.



88

Let's read (an excerpt)

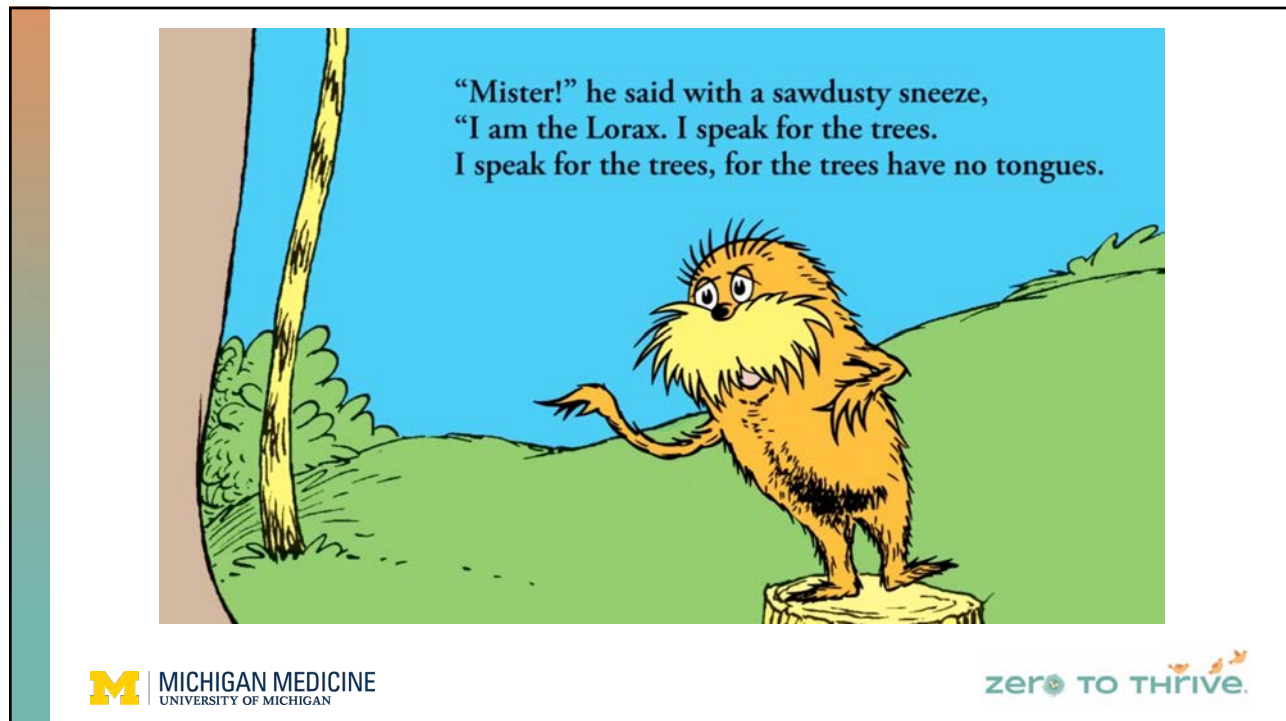
Written by Dr. Seuss
© 1971 New York: Random House

Do not record



Book Synopsis...

- The "Once-ler" lives in a land populated with Truffula trees
- He sees their commercial potential, and begins to market products from these trees
- The Lorax tries to prevent him from destroying the environment and to protect the trees.



91



92

How do YOU think the Lorax felt?

What do you think of when he says “I speak for the trees, for the trees have no tongues?”

93

How do YOU think the Lorax felt?

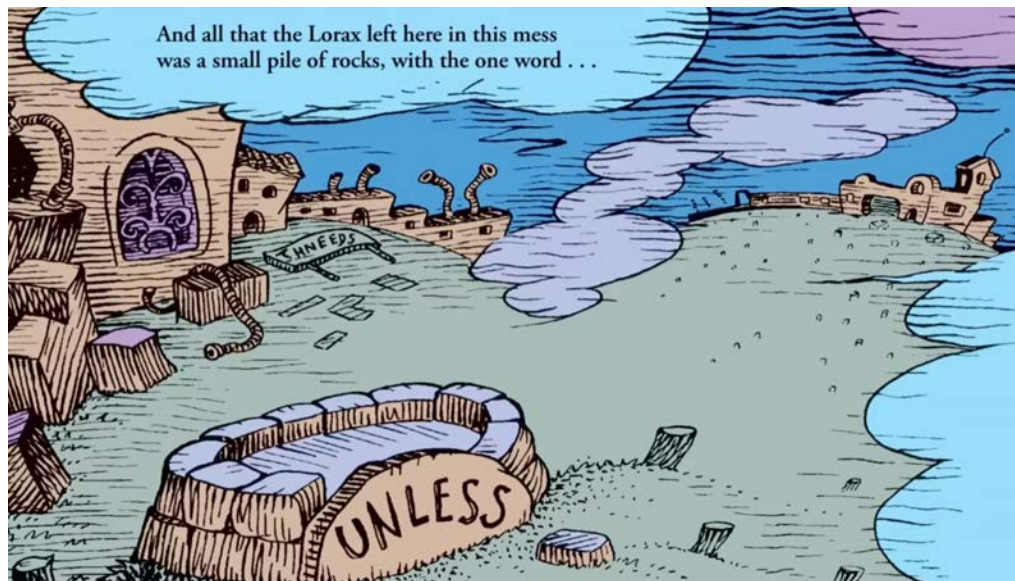
What do you think of when he says “I speak for the trees, for the trees have no tongues?”

(mental state words/prompting reflectivity)

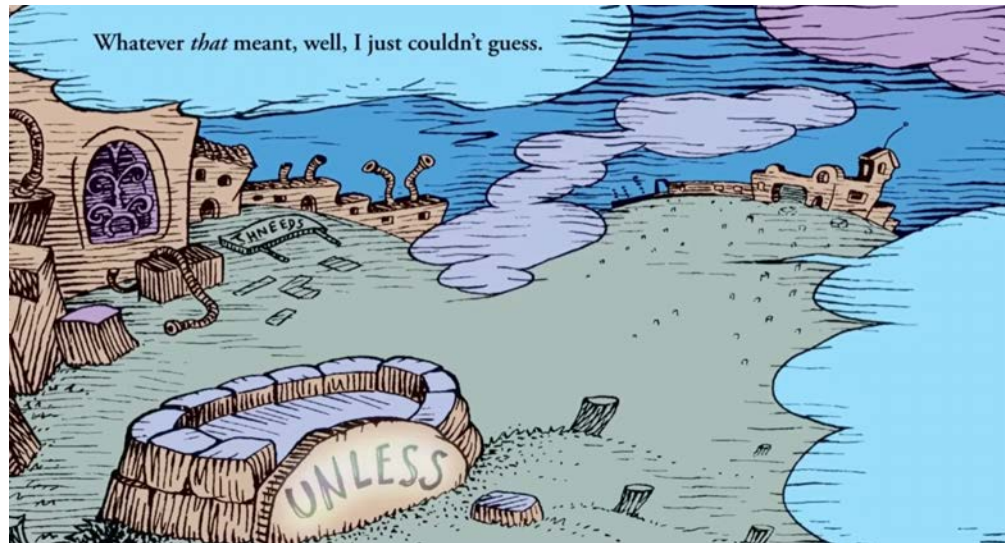
94

[Well, unfortunately, things do not go well for the Truffula Trees.... Resources are depleted, and in distress the Lorax departs, leaving the Once-ler behind and a barren landscape. Amidst the devastation, the Once-ler lives alone and ponders what happened....]

95



96



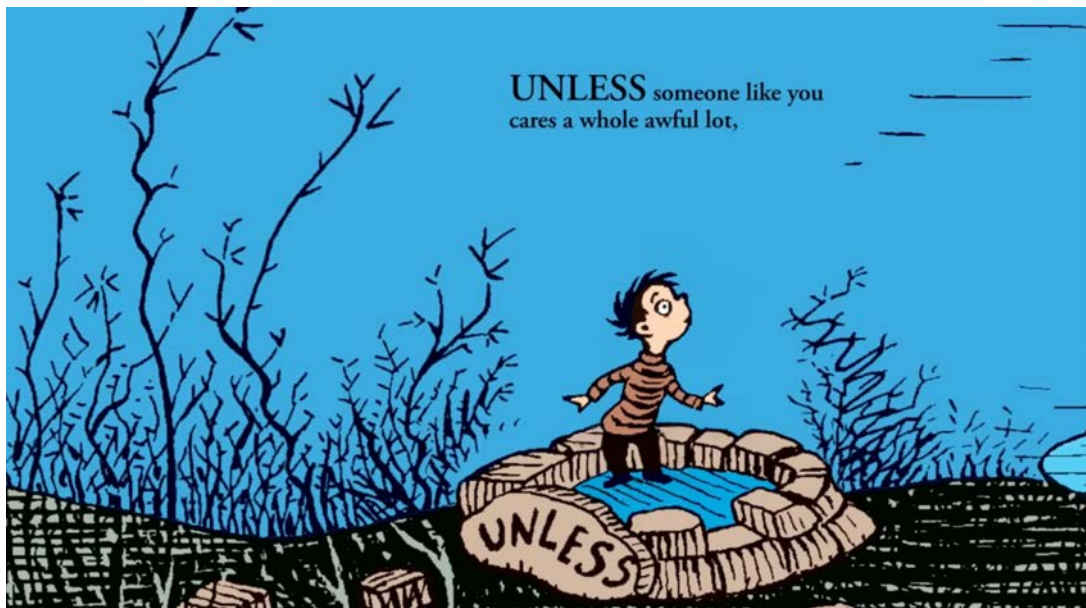
97

How do those pictures make YOU feel?

98

And then, a child arrives...





M MICHIGAN MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

zero TO THRIVE.

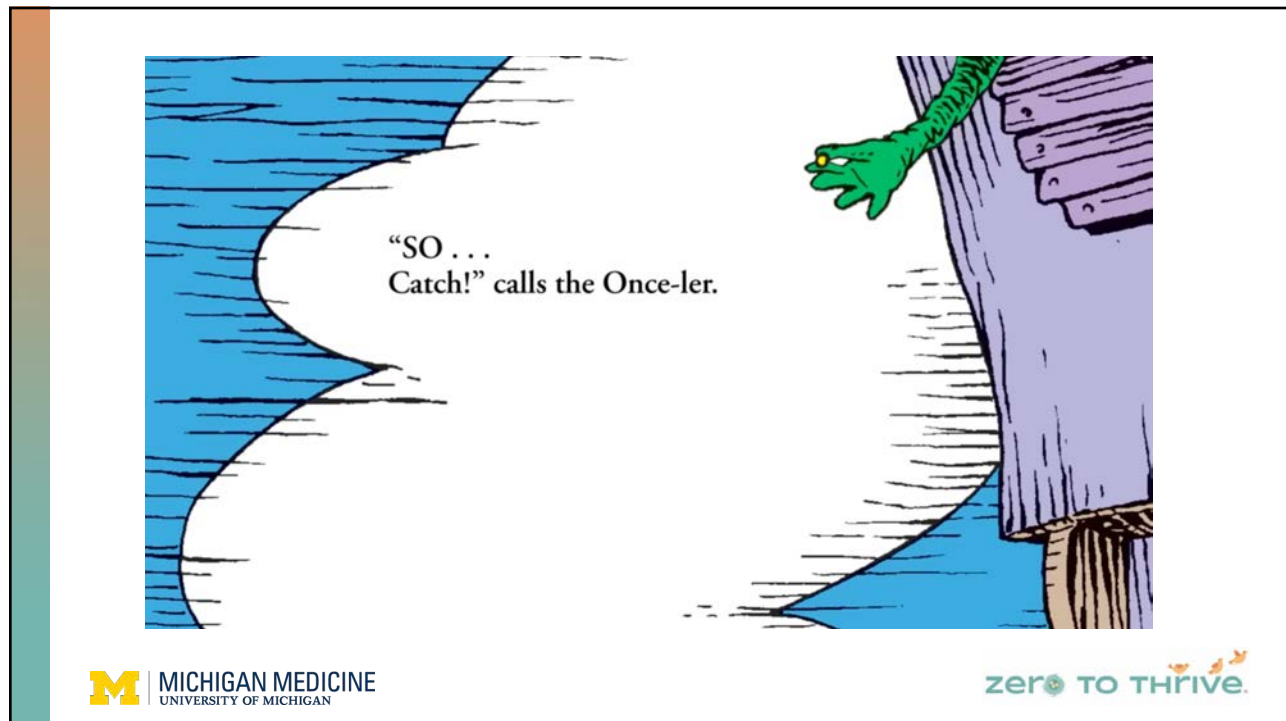
101



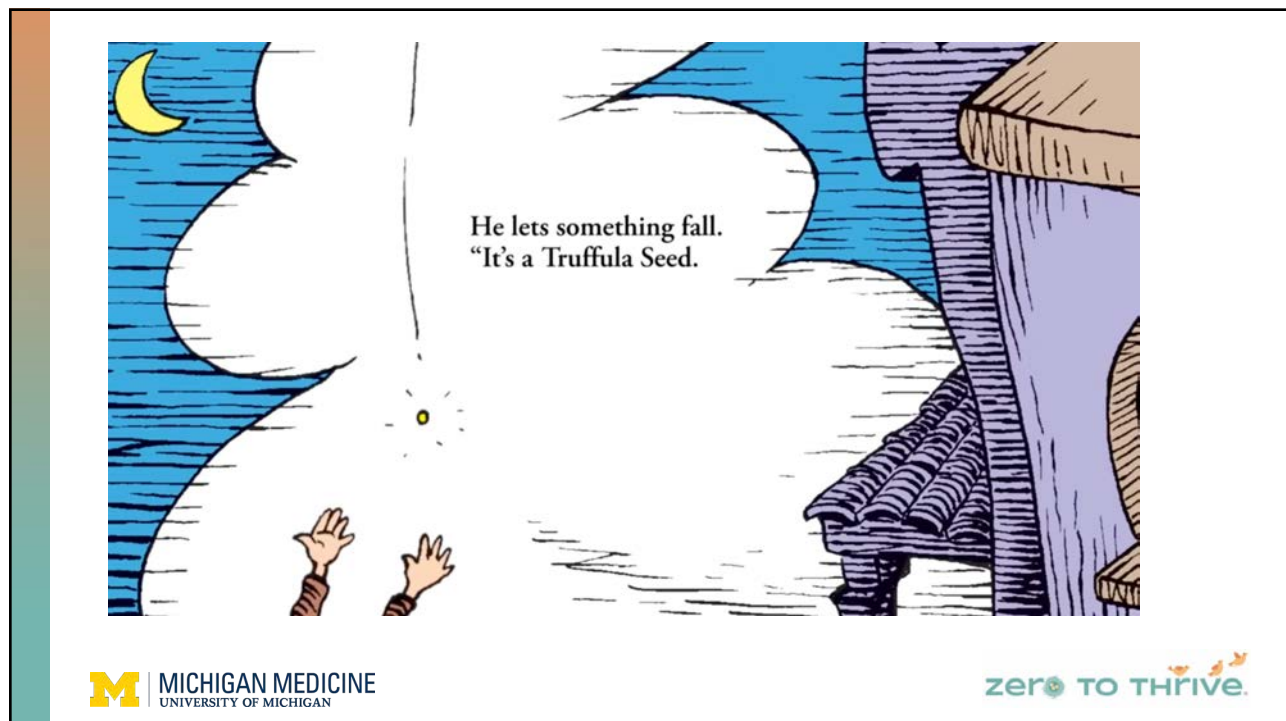
M MICHIGAN MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

zero TO THRIVE.

102



103



104



105

The Once-ler Continues:

"You're in charge of the last of the Truffula Seeds. And Truffula Trees are what everyone needs. Plant a new Truffula. Treat it with care. Give it clean water. Feed it fresh air. Grow a forest. Protect it from axes that hack. Then the Lorax and all of his friends may come back."



106

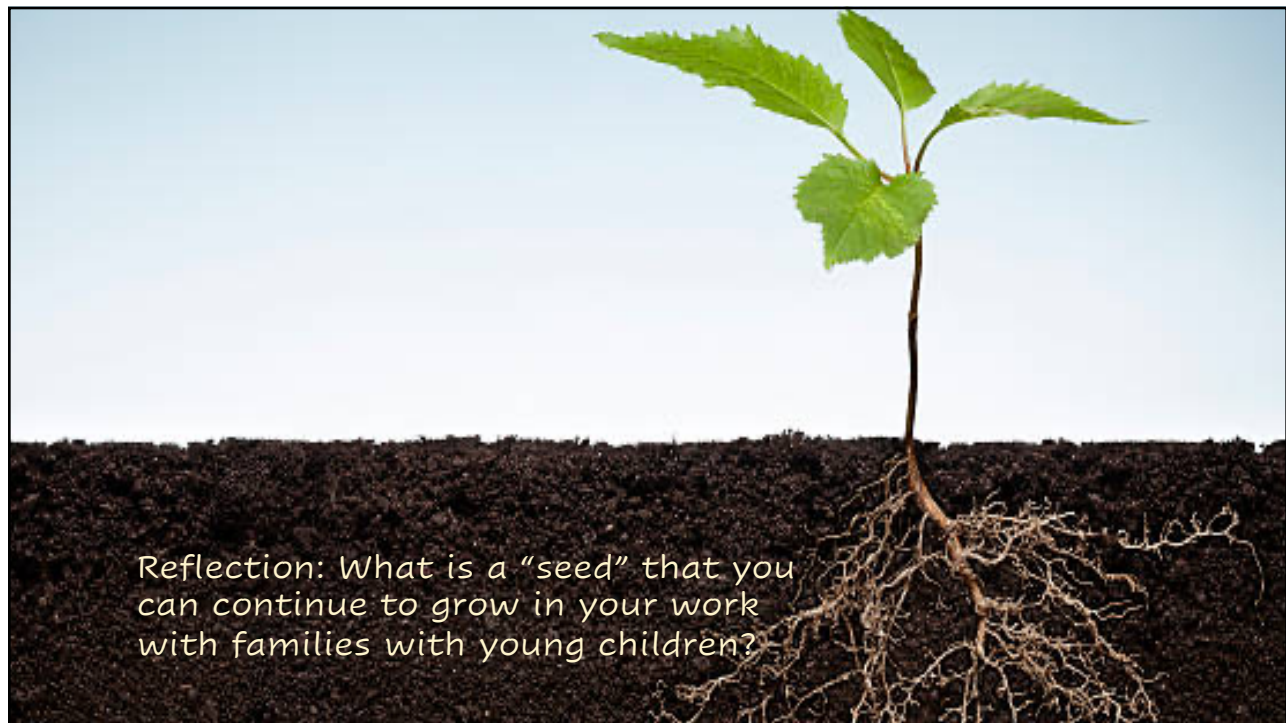
In closing ...

107

*When the Lorax departs, he leaves a message to heed...
for the Once-ler, the future, will begin with a seed.
And for all of us here, gathered together, we see
The future is brighter, when we REACH OUT AND READ!*



108



109

And with gratitude to...

The families who have helped create these programs and have shared their stories and experiences with us

The students, staff, and faculty who have collaborated so closely in this work together

And our funders who made this work possible.

thank YOU all for the work you do!

katier@med.umich.edu



Special shout out to the:
 Wisconsin Association for Infant Mental Health
 Wisconsin Reach Out and Read
 Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board

M | MICHIGAN MEDICINE
 UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

zero TO THRIVE.

110



THANK YOU!
Comments, Q&A

katier@med.umich.edu

 **MICHIGAN MEDICINE**
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN