

zero TO THRIVE
relational health in the early years

**From Zero to Thrive!
Nurturing Resilience in Families from
Pregnancy through Early Childhood**

**14th Annual Early Childhood Mental Health
Conference, San Diego, CA
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No conflicts of interest for this presentation.

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



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“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, *Braiding Sweetgrass*

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A Shared Understanding

- Nurturing and responsive early relationships provide a critical foundation
- Early relational health can 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




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Guiding Principles

- Multigenerational
- Equity
- Social Justice
- Anti-Racist
- Reciprocity
- Capacity for Resilience
- Diverse Families
- Inherent Power and Wisdom of Families
- Science of Early Relational Health

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*Selected findings from
our Zero to Thrive lab:*

*Infant Mental Health Home Visiting
(IMH-HV)
& the Strong Roots Programs*

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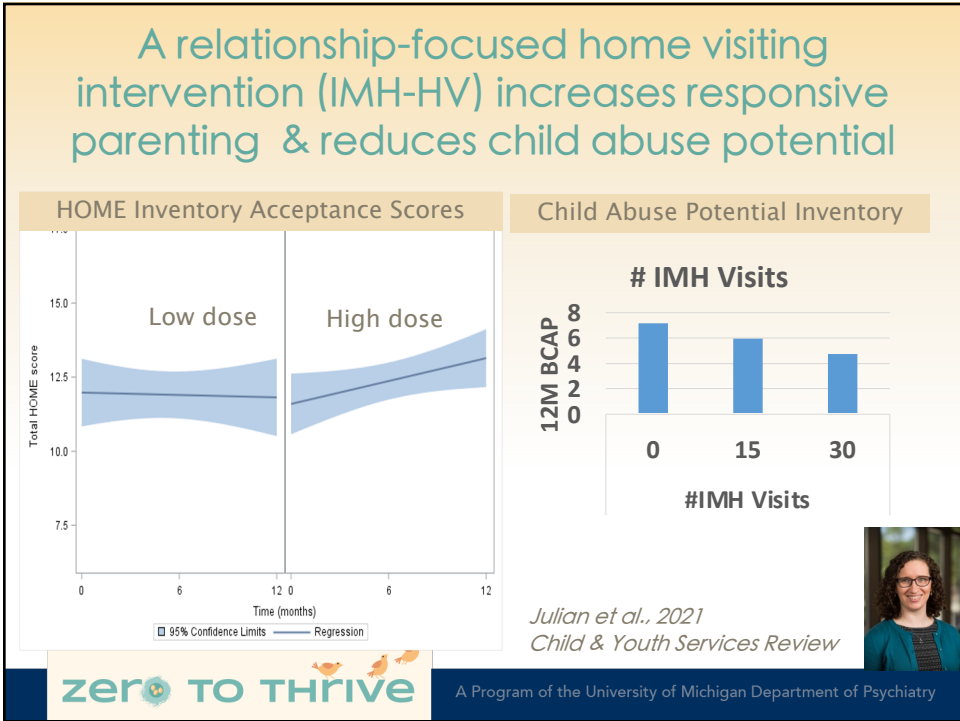
*Relationship-focused
interventions have impact*

*Findings from the
Michigan IMH Home Visiting Studies*

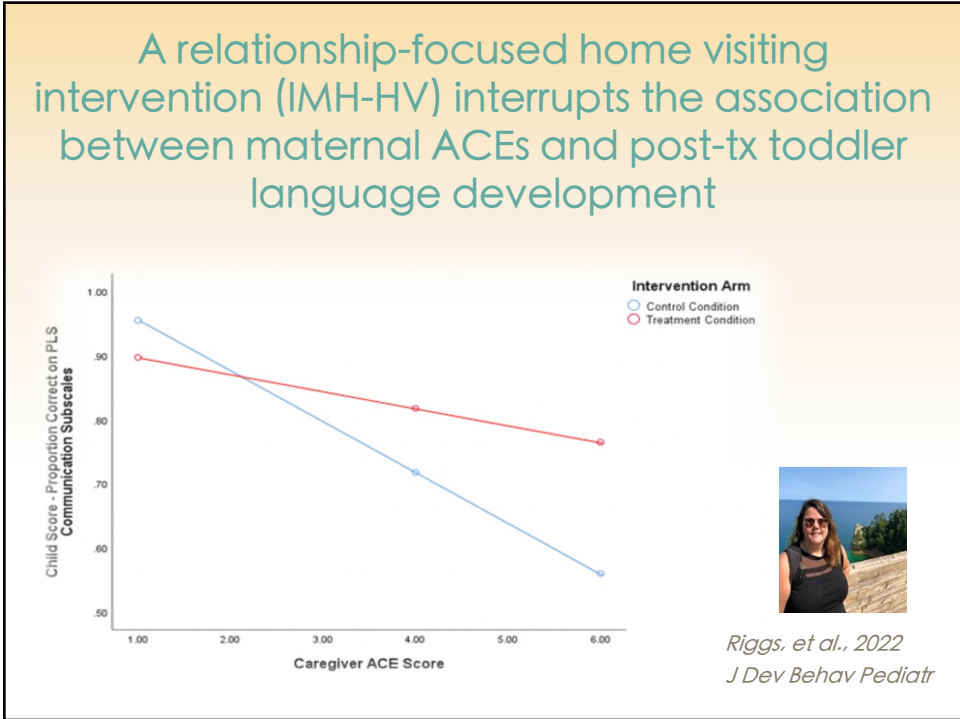


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Relationship-focused interventions can enhance parental reflective functioning, and in turn lead to more responsive parent-child interaction

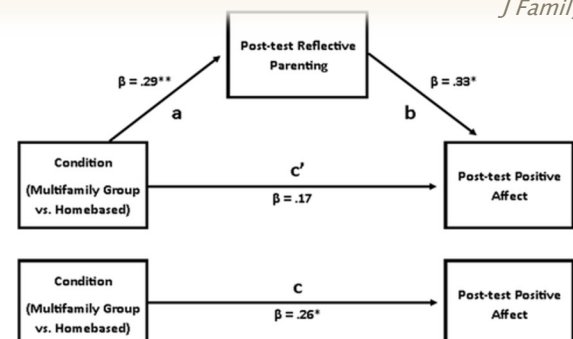
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Strong Roots military family group intervention increases parent emotional responsiveness and positive affect

This effect was explained by increases in parental reflective functioning

*Julian et al., 2018
J Family Psychology*



```

    graph LR
      A["Condition (Multifamily Group vs. Homebased)"] -- "a  
β = .29**" --> B["Post-test Reflective Parenting"]
      B -- "b  
β = .33*" --> C["Post-test Positive Affect"]
      A -- "c'  
β = .17" --> C
      D["Condition (Multifamily Group vs. Homebased)"] -- "c  
β = .26*" --> E["Post-test Positive Affect"]
  
```

Post-Test Reflective Parenting as a mediator of the effect of intervention Condition on posttest observed Positive Affect. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

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It's never too late

Findings from Mom Power Brain Imaging Research

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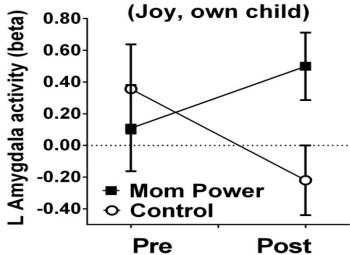
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Strong Roots Mom Power group intervention increases neural activity associated with maternal empathy circuits in response to own infant expressions of joy and reduces parenting stress

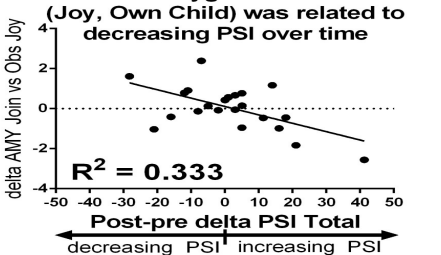
Swain et al., 2017, PLOS

"Join" > "Observe" (Joy, own child)



Group	Pre	Post
Mom Power (■)	~0.10	~0.50
Control (○)	~0.35	~-0.25

Post-Pre left amygdala "Join" > "Obs" (Joy, Own Child) was related to decreasing PSI over time



$R^2 = 0.333$

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Lesson Learned: How and Who we are matters

Findings from a study of community providers (CMH) of Infant Mental Health Home Visiting



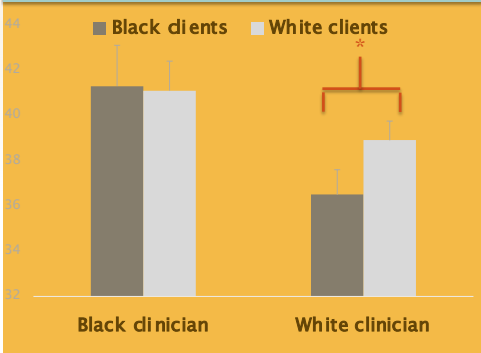


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Provider race/ethnicity is relevant for therapeutic alliance and may help explain differences in program retention


Clinician-rated therapeutic alliance by race of clinician and client




Clinician	Black clients	White clients
Black clinician	~0.88	~0.85
White clinician	~0.65	~0.75*

This has implications for equity, and thus calls for:

- ❖ Addressing factors that promote therapeutic alliance and cultural responsiveness – e.g., through training and RSC
- ❖ Growing diversity in the workforce




Torres et al., 2022, Maternal Child Health J




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*Strong Roots
Programs and
Metaphors*

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A Note.....



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

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Making Complex Models Accessible: Attachment Based Parenting



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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

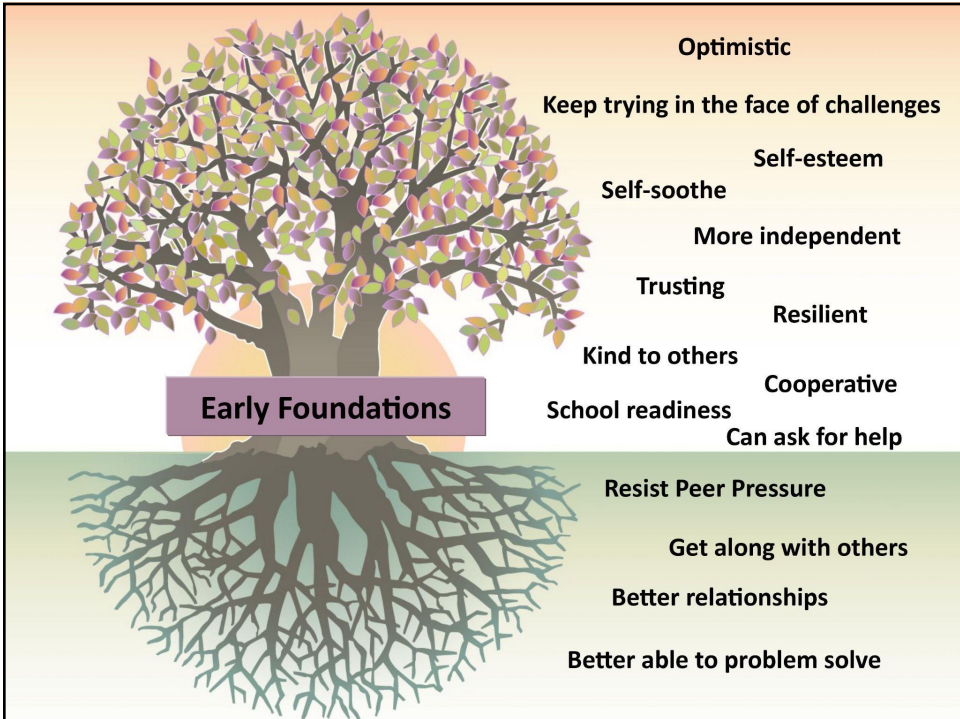
*(but are more vulnerable and
need extra nurturance and care)*

What else?

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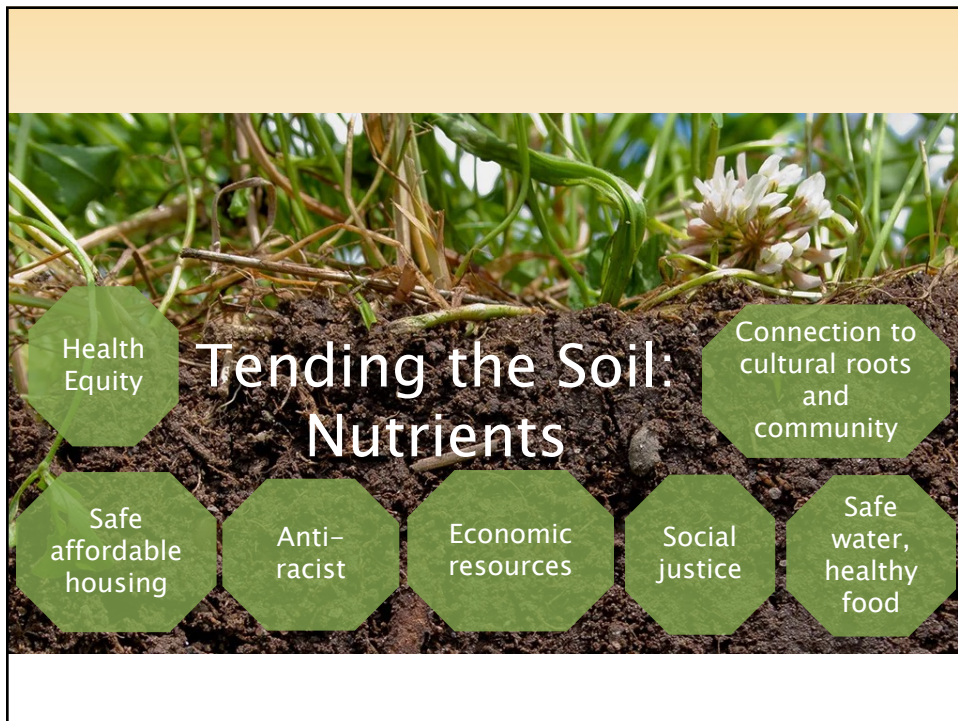
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"I didn't have roots growing up in foster care and now I see how important connection is and I want to build roots with my baby"

*Relationships
Build Roots
& Sprout Hope*

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How do we support parents in using the Tree?



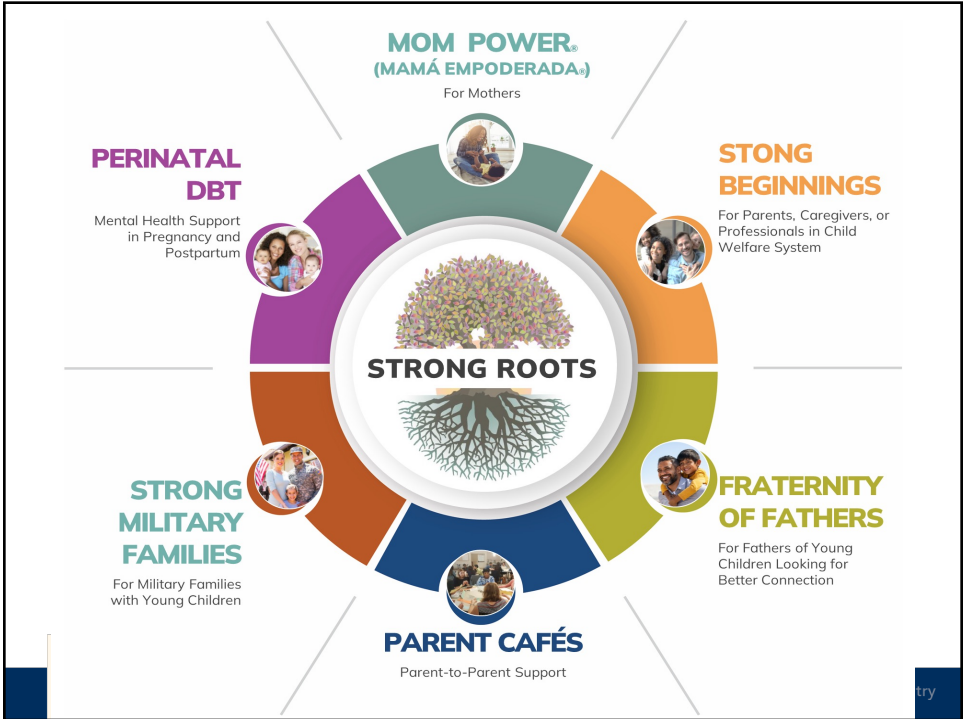
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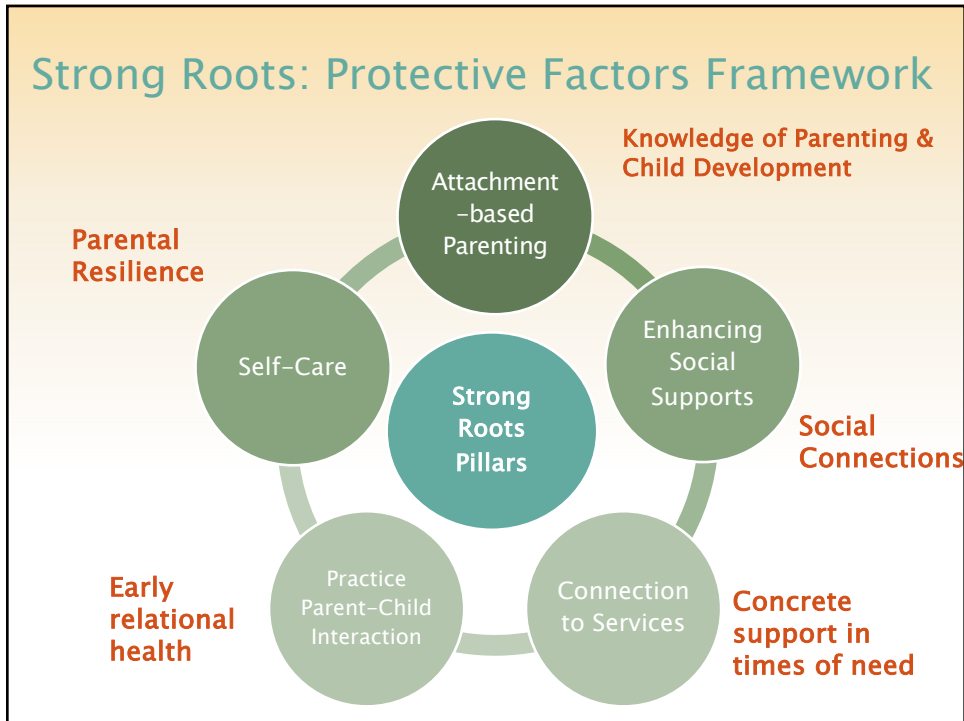
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Zero to Thrive & Be Strong Families

Strong Roots Protective Factors	Strengthening Families Protective Factors
Caring for Myself	Parental Resilience
Connecting with my People	Social Connections
Enjoying with my Child	Social-Emotional Competence of Children/Communication
Supporting Feelings	Knowledge of Parenting & Child Development
Getting Help	Concrete Support in times of need

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Strong Roots Protective Factors

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

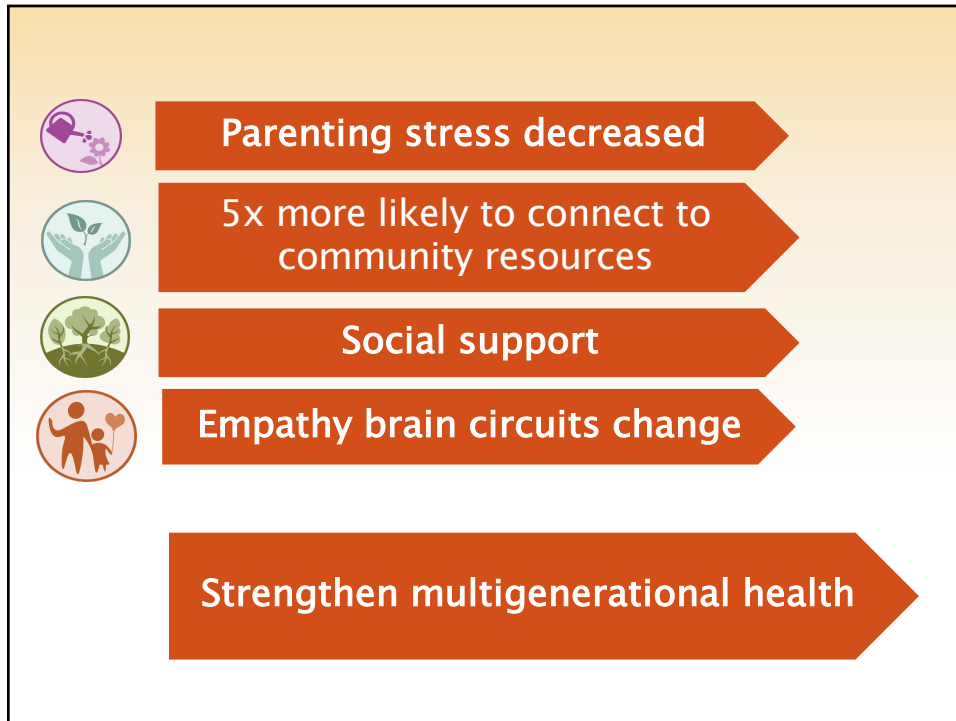
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MOM POWER and STRONG ROOTS PROGRAMS STRENGTHEN PROTECTIVE FACTORS

-  **Decrease symptoms of PTSD and Depression**
-  **Increased reflective functioning**
-  **Improved bonding to baby**
-  **Increased emotional responsiveness**

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Using the Tree to Nurture Strong Roots Protective Factors: Supporting Feelings

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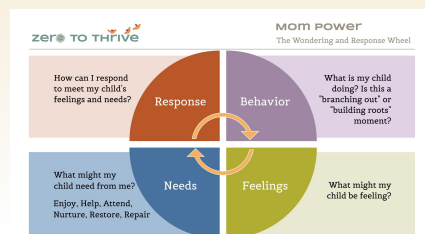
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Wondering Response Wheel

- There is no one-size-fits-all way to respond!
- Allows for and supports the cultural embeddedness of relationships and parenting
- Helps empower parents to walk through a process that promotes reflective functioning
- The WRW does not end- it can go around and around
- You can process past events and "be detectives" together!



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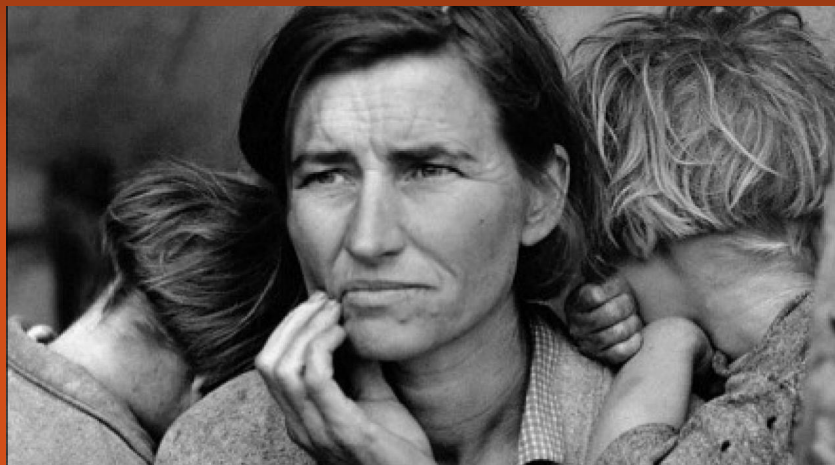
*Some reflection questions:
Bringing the Tree to your work*



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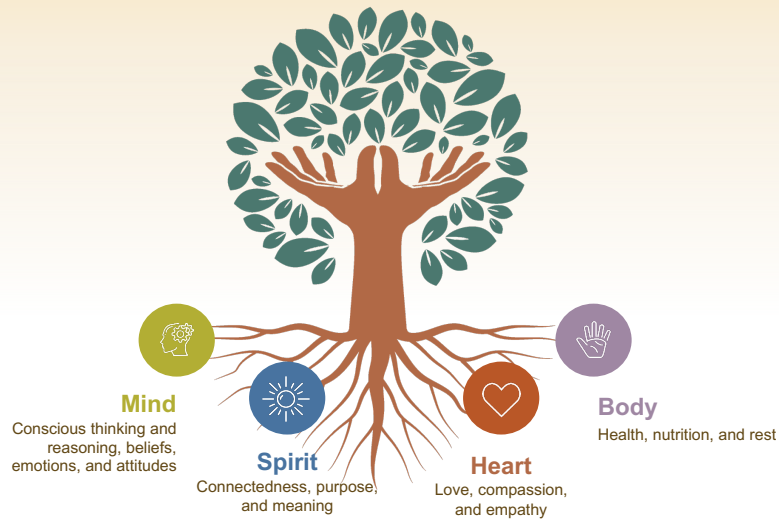
**How do we support parents' exploration (branching out)
while also meeting their needs for connection
(strengthening roots)?**



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How do we as individuals (or colleagues, or agencies) tend to our own roots as we support others?



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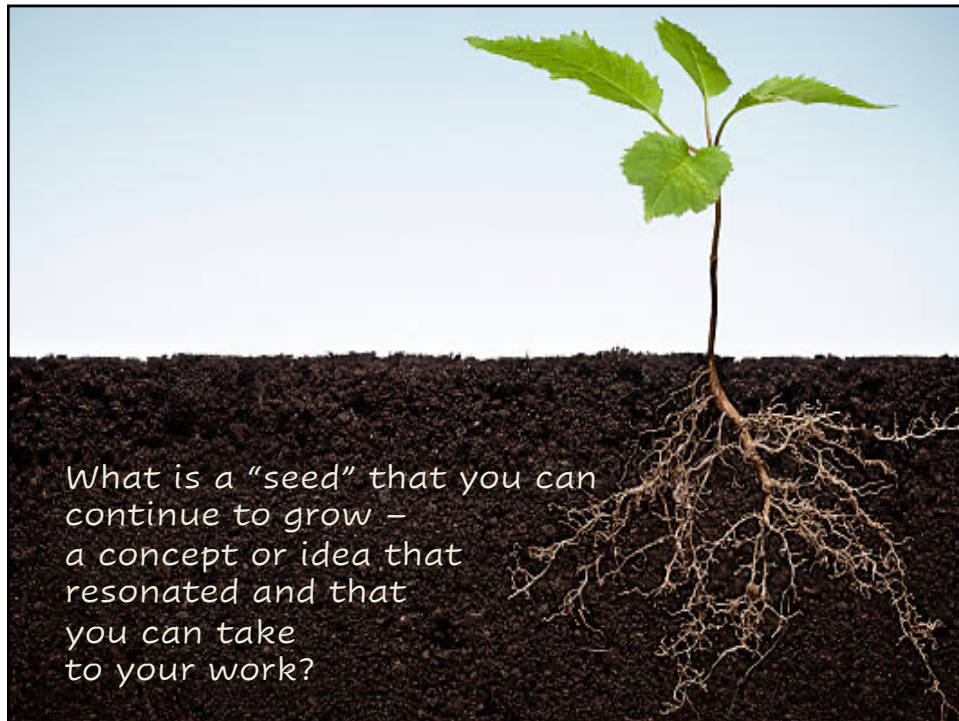
How do we tend to the soil to fully embrace an anti-racist, culturally humble, equity-focused stance in our work with families and with one another?



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With gratitude to


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And our funders who made this work possible.

thank you!

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Reflections and Q&A

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