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## Research Paper

# “I now see my toddler as a helper, not just somebody in need of help”: Raising Helpful Toddlers training<sup>☆</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Helping other people benefits children and is fundamental to a functioning society. A novel training, Raising Helpful Toddlers (RHT), focuses on beneficial Indigenous heritage parent socialization practices previously described. RHT participants were thirty U.S. toddler parents/caregivers, aged 28–46, 26/4 female/male ratio; 73.3 % White, 13.3 % Asian, 6.7 % African or Black/African American, 3.3 % Asian and White, 3.3 % American Indian and Hispanic, and highly educated on average, with children aged 12 to 48 months. RHT consists of a 2-hour online training, followed up with daily logs and interviews to support the training while collecting qualitative data. Feasibility was indicated by high rates of parent recruitment, satisfaction, and use of RHT strategies. Average parenting self-efficacy increased at post-test, with a moderate to large effect size, according to a repeated-measures *t*-test,  $t(28)=3.792$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.58$ . Many parents reported improvements at post-test including less stress when doing chores and changed beliefs, actions, and speech. Results suggest that parenting practices described in Indigenous-heritage families can be beneficial across cultural contexts. Keywords: Indigenous, Parenting, Family, Intervention, Early Care, Early Education, Prosocial Behavior, Moral Development.

Toddlers' first opportunities to help others often happen at home, and across cultures, early helping at home is thought to impact children's developmental trajectory of helping (Alcalá et al., 2014; Coppens et al., 2016; Coppens & Rogoff, 2021; Grusec et al., 1996; Gaskins, 2020; Rogoff, 2003). Raising Helpful Toddlers (RHT), a new training for parents of 12- to 48-month-olds, focuses on child behaviors, parent practices, and parent beliefs regarding toddlers' helping at home that are commonly recognized as beneficial to toddlers and their developmental trajectory of helping. Evidence for such benefits is provided by this body of ethnographic and cross-cultural literature involving Indigenous-heritage families of the Americas, as well as in research regarding social development within predominantly white, European-heritage families. Through RHT, parents are encouraged to welcome toddlers' participation in everyday household endeavors in ways that are developmentally appropriate. The goal is to introduce these practices where and when they are not used and to support families already using these practices. While cross-cultural studies have clearly identified parenting differences related to toddlers' helping

behaviors and indicated their importance, this study is the first to test whether children's helping interactions at home can change through parent training.

Many cultures across the globe support children's initiative to contribute to the household steadily from a young age (e.g., Alcalá et al., 2014; Coppens et al., 2016; Lancy, 2020; Mezzenzana, 2020; Whiting & Whiting, 1975). In studies with Indigenous-heritage families of the Americas, parents' support of children's help with household endeavors (e.g., “chores”) from toddlerhood is associated with children helping more from their own initiative and in more complex ways as toddlers (Coppens & Rogoff, 2021; de Haan, 1999; Gaskins, 1999; Lancy, 2020; Mezzenzana, 2020), and throughout later developmental stages as shown by cross-sectional studies and ethnographic evidence (Coppens & Rogoff, 2021; de Haan, 1999; Gaskins, 1999, 2020; Mezzenzana, 2020; Ochs & Izquierdo, 2009). This developmental trajectory likely stems from an emphasis on connection, relationship, harmony, and an ethics of caring often described in Indigenous Knowledge Systems (see Anchorage Declaration, 2009; Bang & Marin, 2015; Dayton & Rogoff, 2016;

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Huambachano, 2019; Kari-Oca 2 Declaration, 2012; Kimmerer, 2011; Ulrich, 2019).

Many U.S. parents' practices are not very effective at realizing parents' goals regarding children helping, nor do they fit with extant scientific evidence. Laboratory studies, naturalistic experimental paradigms, and ethnographic evidence all point to toddlers having strong motivation to help as early as 12 months of age (Dahl, 2015; de Haan, 1999; Forman, 2007; Hepach et al., 2013; Liszkowski et al., 2007; 2008; Rheingold, 1982; Rogoff et al., 1993; Warneken & Tomasello, 2008, 2013). Evidence suggests that it is beneficial to children to do so (Umino & Dammeyer, 2016), and U.S. parents find it important that their child grow to help others (Klein & Goodwin, 2013; Pew, 2023). Yet decades of ethnographic evidence suggest that in families with more Western-style education in the U.S. and Mexico, children tend to lack initiative and resist helping around the house when directed, causing parent-child conflict (Coppens et al., 2016; Klein & Goodwin, 2013; Ochs & Izquierdo, 2009; Ochs & Kremer-Sadlik, 2015; Whiting & Whiting, 1973). Parent practices and beliefs vary along with those differences in children helping: parents of children who help with more initiative explicitly aim for children to participate fully with their own agency and are confident that they can and will (Coppens & Rogoff, 2021; Coppens et al., 2020; Ochs & Kremer-Sadlik, 2013; Rogoff, 2003).

The aim of RHT is to allow all parents to better achieve parenting goals for children to help by focusing on what practices families use in comparison to their goals, and to adopt or bolster practices known to be effective where possible and beneficial. Widely held parenting goals to raise helpful children were hypothesized to drive beneficial change after taking RHT training (Fairchild, 2021).

## 1. Toddlers' motivation and ability

Toddlers are not only enthusiastic, but also capable of helping in small but significant ways. At about 12–14 months of age, children are observed to help others in home and laboratory studies through simple actions, such as handing things to people, and pointing (Dahl, 2015; Dahl et al., 2017; de Haan, 1999; Gaskins, 1999; Liszkowski et al., 2007; Warneken & Tomasello, 2007; 2008). The early years of life when children are first learning how to coordinate their actions physically and socially might be an important period for parents to encourage and guide their enthusiasm to help (Coppens & Rogoff, 2021; Fairchild, 2021).

Children's spontaneous helping differs across communities in concert with parents' views of toddlers' motivations. When interviewed, many U.S. mothers who can be described as 'Using a White, European-heritage Constellation' of parenting practices (UWEC, Fairchild, 2021), thought that toddlers would rather go play than help, and/or toddlers were not capable of helping from their own initiative (Coppens & Rogoff, 2021; Coppens et al., 2020). In contrast, many Indigenous-heritage mothers described that toddlers want to help and that they are capable of pitching in early on, perspectives consistent with laboratory, observational, and ethnographic evidence (Coppens & Rogoff, 2021; Dahl, 2015; Dahl et al., 2017; de Haan, 1999; Gaskins, 1999; Lancy, 2020; Mezzenzana, 2020; Liszkowski et al., 2007; 2008; Newton et al., 2016; Rheingold, 1982; Rogoff et al., 1993; Warneken & Tomasello, 2006, 2007; Whiting & Whiting, 1975). Despite strong cross-cultural evidence, parenting interventions do not commonly recognize that toddlers can help through their own initiative or capitalize on toddlers' enthusiasm for helping.

### 1.1. Toddlers' autonomy and agency

Cross-cultural studies highlight the importance of children's agency and autonomy to contribute to the group. Indigenous-heritage parents rarely demand or extensively direct children's helping; common parent goals in Mexico are for children to be 'acomodada/o:' sensitive to the needs of the group and other people, to provide help and contribute from

their own initiative (Alcalá et al., 2014; Coppens et al., 2014; Coppens et al., 2016; Coppens & Rogoff, 2021; de Haan, 1999; López et al., 2012). Children's autonomy and working for/with the group are therefore not in conflict or exclusive but go together given children's high motivation to help - seeing that motivation, which is evidenced across cultures, and allowing children's autonomy then leads to children taking initiative to help. Accordingly, parents' roles are to support and guide while allowing agency and autonomy, not to coerce or control (Coppens & Rogoff, 2021). This guidance can be seen as a form of scaffolding, though of a different sort than commonly taught in Western schooling. For example, a Mazahua parent believed that "too much teaching" is distracting for children and decreases their motivation (de Haan, 1999, p. 91); the implication is that just enough teaching as the child is doing a task may be the key (see Paradise et al., 2014).

Evidence from UWEC samples similarly indicates that above 15 months of age, explicit prompts and directives are not associated with toddlers' later helping in laboratory trials, although below 15 months, an association was found (Dahl, 2015; Dahl et al., 2017; Hammond & Carpendale, 2015; Rheingold, 1982; Warneken & Tomasello, 2013). Above the age of 15 months, then, prompts and directives might best be more subtle and in the service of helping the child do what they are already intending to do. When children are over 15 months of age, however, UWEC parents and teachers commonly explicitly direct them or assign when and how to help (Coppens & Rogoff, 2021; Coppens et al., 2014; Coppens et al., 2016; Ochs & Izquierdo, 2009; Ochs & Kremer-Sadlik, 2013; Paradise et al., 2014; Rogoff et al., 1993). In fact, 80 % of UWEC parents of 2–3 or 6–7-year-olds reported thinking that children needed to be asked to help (Coppens & Rogoff, 2017). The implications of these findings are profound: many UWEC parents inaccurately believe children are not able to help spontaneously even in small ways; rather, they think they need to be controlled and persuaded through contingent rewards to do so (Coppens & Rogoff, 2021; Coppens et al., 2014; Coppens et al., 2016). The evidence described above suggests otherwise; and there is additional evidence that even middle class, Euro-heritage 4-year-olds helped more when their parents did not demand it in the moment (Grusec et al., 1996). Nonetheless, interventions that recognize and encourage toddlers to take agency to benefit others are not known to the authors.

### 1.2. Learning to be a responsible, participating member of the family

Toddlers from Indigenous-heritage families often grow up as active participants in their communities and social worlds. Ethnographic observations revealed that in the first two years of life, toddlers were regularly included in household work in Maya communities and a Mazahua community in Mexico (de Haan, 1999; Gaskins, 1999; Rogoff et al., 1993). In a comparative study describing Maya cultural practices, toddlers 1–2 years of age were generally more integrated into family endeavors than toddlers in a U.S. city where toddler activities were often segregated (Rogoff et al., 1993). In the Maya community, 4- to 6-year-olds helped extensively around the house in complex ways, significantly contributing to running the household.

By working with adults for the benefit of the family, toddlers can experience through their actions inclusion and respect as fully participatory members of the family (Coppens et al., 2016; Rogoff, 2014; Rogoff et al., 1993). Children become responsible to the group in ways that are developmentally appropriate, motivating them to be sensitive to what is going on around them and what needs to be done (Alcalá et al., 2021; Gaskins, 1999; Rogoff et al., 1993). Household chores were considered collaborative efforts for the benefit of the family by Indigenous-heritage mothers interviewed, and in other studies, by their children as well (Alcalá et al., 2014, 2021; Coppens et al., 2014; Coppens et al., 2016; Morelli et al., 2003). Children experienced, and parents saw, helping in daily tasks as an act of belonging and participating in an overarching family collaboration, as well as enacting a sense of responsibility and caring toward family members.

In contrast, UWEC families focused on children's self-care, individual efforts, and child-centered activities as directed by parents, e.g., cleaning up toys, or brushing teeth (Coppens & Rogoff, 2021; Coppens et al., 2016; Goodnow, 1988; Goodnow & Delaney, 1989). In this way, social, community, and moral aspects of helping tended to be de-emphasized. Thus, UWEC children may be missing an opportunity for social learning and early moral development (Fairchild, 2021).

Early collaboration is regarded as foundational to the development of social cognition (Brownell, 2011; Moll & Tomasello, 2007). Some researchers suggest that affiliation and social interaction are primary early motivators for infants' helping, and that an early emphasis on collaboration and inclusion promote infants' helping habits (Brownell, 2011; Carpendale & Lewis, 2004; Coppens et al., 2016; Dahl, 2015; Over & Carpenter, 2009; Rheingold, 1982). Although there is agreement across cultures that collaboration is an important socialization factor in children's development, particularly in the early development of instrumental helping, collaboration toward shared family goals is not commonly an element of parenting interventions.

### 1.3. Supporting toddler helping – Raising Helpful Toddlers (RHT) parent training

RHT was designed to inspire parents' greater awareness of and attention to parenting goals of raising children who are helpful, and to give parents who need them tools to work toward those goals in everyday life (See RHT Training Elements in the Methods section and Table 2). Parents' values to raise children who are helpful are hypothesized to drive motivation toward beneficial change from RHT. RHT may benefit families by encouraging parent practices supporting children to take initiative to help the family in complex ways as they grow, thereby providing children more and better opportunities to meaningfully engage with their family and gain support in their development of helping. Parents who are already using any RHT strategies are given information that validates their practices. RHT is predicted to benefit families at a foundational level by encouraging them to align, or maintain alignment of, daily practices with goals for children to help and be helpful.

Other potential benefits may come from RHT. The evidence reviewed above suggests that many parents may be unaware that toddlers are often motivated to help and may be misinterpreting toddlers' attempts to help in the moment, thereby missing the opportunity to set children on a developmental trajectory of optimal helping (Fairchild, 2021). Understanding this aspect of toddler's actions in the moment would then potentially benefit families by increasing parents' positive attributions of toddler actions (Beckerman et al., 2017; Pidgeon & Sanders, 2009). Further, it would allow parents to more accurately understand what toddlers are able to do and why they may do it – thereby making it possible for them to respond more sensitively and more appropriately (Fairchild, 2021). After RHT, parents may also recognize that encouraging children's agency to help is appropriate, is supported by evidence in the literature, and fits parent and toddler goals alike. If RHT is successful in conveying this information and providing useful strategies, parents are predicted to increase their accuracy in interpreting children's cues, ability to respond appropriately, and confidence in parenting effectively.

## 2. The current study

The feasibility and acceptability of RHT was tested in the current study, which was also designed to detect any initial indications of training effects, such as parents changing their practices and outlook and reporting more/better-quality toddler collaborative helping interactions. Interventions are often designed to motivate people to change. In this case, whatever parents' baseline practices, it was predicted that parents' already-existing aspirations regarding children's helping would provide strong motivation to take up RHT-suggested

strategies, or to maintain or improve upon any strategies they already use.

To assess feasibility and get a preliminary picture of RHT's potential impact, mixed-methods assessments included in-depth parent reports to measure whether parents reported differences in the amount and quality of toddlers' collaborative helping after RHT. In-depth interviews also allowed for theory building regarding parents' experiences of RHT and effects of RHT. Parent beliefs explored in qualitative data were those that matched core RHT components, namely that toddlers are motivated to help, toddlers can help, toddlers' participation in the family can be quality time, and it is important to support children's agency to help the family from the early years. Practices explored were parents' noticing and supporting toddlers' bids to help around the house, and encouraging and allowing toddler autonomy, agency, and collaboration. Another research question was whether parents would increase their feelings of efficacy in being able to help bring about positive development for their children. Potential mechanisms for changes were considered from the experiences parents described in qualitative data.

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Positionality statement

At the time of this study, the first author, who is also the program developer, had over a decade of experience working with families with infants or toddlers by way of implementing research protocols, and a year's experience as a parent coach and educator for a social service agency. This experience proved useful for encouraging parents, whatever their background practices and whatever their experiences during the training period, in seeing themselves as the experts in their own situation, family, and child. The underlying assumption was that parents were motivated by the best interests of their child, even when changes in practices toward RHT suggestions were advised. Further, the first author/program developer's standpoint as a U.S.-born, White Ph.D. student with a UWEC upbringing informed reflexively while creating the training and interacting with participants. Having direct experiences in the more common, dominant cultural paradigm that is regularly presented in society as best-practices may have in some ways facilitated teaching parents about potentially shifting those UWEC practices and beliefs. Something of an insider critique was then possible: an insider both within academic institutions that study and suggest best parenting practices, and in having a UWEC background.

The first author/program developer often reflected on not having direct experience with Indigenous heritage family practices, widely read cross-cultural and ethnographic works, and consulted with authors of relevant research studies for suggestions and feedback. She presented preliminary versions to scholars with lived experience in practices that aligned more closely with Indigenous heritage families as found in previous studies. Reflexivity plus the input of those scholars drove an iterative process of newly recognizing assumptions and biases in the training and adapting the training as a result. While the input of other scholars was crucial, the design and presentation were nonetheless necessarily a product of a limited view of how being raised by parents works, and for families with lived experience aligned more toward collaborative Indigenous heritage ways, the training might not fit parents' needs as well, or fit with how they do things. Flexibility was therefore designed into the training, and in working with parents to better identify any such problems. Potential barriers for parents within the training / data collection process were addressed in part by openly acknowledging to parents that the research was a work in progress. For parents born outside the U.S. especially, the interviewer made clear that their parenting values and cultural experiences may not match elements of the training, and if that were the case, that this would be important and valuable information to share if they were willing. Pointing out that their suggestions and experiences would help to make the training/research better in the future could then draw parents in as true

collaborators in the work while also welcoming and legitimizing their own critiques and unique personal experiences.

### 3.2. Participants

Thirty parents aged 28–46 (Racial identities of parents: 73.3 % White, 13.3 % Asian, 3.3 % African American, 3.3 % African, 6.7 % Bi- or Multi-cultural) with at least one 12- to 48-month-old child were recruited at childcare and early education centers with diverse populations in a small U.S. Midwestern city, and through nearby rural family Extension offices. Recruitment announcements offered a parent training about toddlers' social emotional development and parent-child interaction, and described the questionnaire, daily log, and interview protocol. Parents were 26.7 % foreign-born; birth countries: Bulgaria, China, Greece, Hungary, India, Nigeria. Table 1 presents demographic characteristics; notably, parents were highly educated.

### 3.3. Raising helpful toddlers training

In RHT, parents are taught about the research reviewed here regarding toddlers who grow up helping in some Indigenous-heritage families without having to be asked, in complex ways, and with an

**Table 1**  
Sample demographics.

	n	%
<b>Child Age</b>		
<i>M</i> = 1.9 (0.72, 12–48 mo)	30	
1–2 years	16	53.3
2–3 years	12	40.0
3–4 years	2	6.7
<b>Child Sex</b>		
Female	16	53.3
Male	14	46.7
<b>Parent Age</b>		
<i>M</i> = 35.7 (4.8, 28–46)	29	
<b>Parent Sex</b>		
Female	26	86.7
Male	4	13.3
<b>Parents In Home</b>		
1 parent	1	3.3
2 parents	29	96.7
<b>Siblings</b>		
1 Older	5	16.7
None	21	70.0
1 Younger	5	16.7
1 Older and 1 Younger	1	3.3
<b>Parent Education</b>		
Some High School	0	0.0
High School Diploma or GED	0	0.0
Some college but no degree	2	6.7
Bachelor's degree	7	23.3
Associate's Degree	0	0.0
Master's degree	8	26.7
Doctoral degree	11	36.7
Professional degree (JD, MD)	2	6.7
Total Responses	30	
<b>Parent Race</b>		
White	22	73.3
Asian	4	13.3
African American	1	3.3
African	1	3.3
Bi- or Multi-cultural	2	6.7
Total Responses	30	
<b>Child Race</b>		
White	19	63.3
Asian	3	10.0
African	1	3.3
Bi- or Multi-cultural	7	23.3
Total Responses	30	

advanced ability to recognize what needs to be done in their family setting. This illustrates that toddlers are motivated to help, as does laboratory evidence, and that they are capable of a developmental trajectory of increased collaboration and contribution to the family. The core concepts of RHT include: a) toddlers like to help, b) toddlers can help, and be participating members of the family (Coppens et al., 2014; Coppens et al., 2016; Coppens & Rogoff, 2021; Coppens et al., 2020; Rogoff et al., 1993), and c) there are likely long-lasting benefits of supporting and guiding unskilled, early attempts to help (Coppens & Rogoff, 2021; Coppens et al., 2020).

### 3.4. Flexibility and fidelity design elements

A goal of RHT is for core concepts to be reliably delivered to all parents, with built-in flexibility to adapt their translation according to individual circumstances (e.g., Cohen et al., 2008; Dunst & Trivette, 2009; Kendall et al., 2008; Mazzucelli et al., 2010). Cohen et al. (2008) found that successful implementation of health-promotion interventions involved practitioners routinely making changes to interventions to accommodate participants' particular circumstances as well as to reiterate, retrain, assist, and motivate participants. RHT builds in opportunities for such individual adaptation. RHT is also designed to answer a call for providing specific everyday suggestions to increase parenting intervention efficacy, as opposed to providing only abstract content (e.g., Brownell et al., 2013; Svetlova et al., 2010). Regarding cross-cultural adaptation, a focus on practices and patterns of practices can be useful in understanding how children might best learn, e.g., Gutiérrez & Rogoff (2003)'s 'repertoires of practice', vs asserting concepts of ability and cultural identity as static traits. When interactions in the moment are highlighted, choices to move toward desired outcomes based on evidence-based practices become visible.

Parents who may be less comfortable with group settings were accommodated by giving them opportunities to answer online open-ended questions after the RHT training session, and talk individually twice with the interviewer, who was also the first author/program developer. Parents and the interviewer/first author problem-solved and brainstormed how parents might modify what they were doing at home. Through these elements, flexibility was also built into the training protocol to accommodate diverse background practices, beliefs, and home situations.

### 3.5. Target child age range

RHT was designed for parents of toddlers within a wide age range, and therefore a wide range of behaviors and abilities, with the assumption that some aspects of parent socialization are constant across ages, and important to encouraging a long-term developmental trajectory of helping with more initiative, and as a habit. A foundation of the theory of change for RHT is that parent values related to helping motivate them to change practices, and these basic parenting values likely remain steady across children's early years. Similarly, aspects of socialization that match these values can be encouraged and maintained throughout early years, with adjustments as the child ages. For example, an important aspect of RHT is targeting parent beliefs about children's motivations and what is possible; beliefs which are important as children develop and may serve as a basic framework for parents' socialization practices through time. Creating a welcoming environment for toddlers around what is done every day to keep up the household can be accomplished across ages. Knowing that at least some disruptive behavior comes from toddlers' intention to help was predicted to be useful for parents across the full age range as well.

The intervention approach taken here of flexibility with fidelity fits this aspect of the theory of change well by providing a backbone of standard knowledge and suggestions that can be tailored to families' particular situation, including their child's age and how they are developing in the moment. RHT also provides parents with different



basic strategies based upon age – younger children may just want/need to watch household tasks being completed, for example. This approach allows parents to improvise and positions them as experts in their own family, child, and home life.

Ethnographic work and nationwide surveys suggest that UWEC parents are already trying to get their children to help (Pew Research Center, 2023), but they seem to be using practices that are not very effective and using them at a much later time in development than families who have more success (Coppens & Rogoff, 2021; Ochs & Izquierdo, 2009; Ochs & Kremer-Sadlik, 2013). Based upon that evidence, a core assumption behind the creation of RHT is that it is more effective to start early, and as the age of 1 is the earliest it is thought children start helping others, (cf. Hammond et al., 2017), that is the lowest end of the age range. Parents of children beyond 2 years were included as throughout those next years, toddlers' physical, emotional, and social development establishes many important foundations. Many, fast-changing developmental processes may be malleable in different ways at different times across these early years, and including a wider range of ages allows optimal detection potential for beneficial changes

### 3.6. RHT training elements

In RHT, parents are presented evidence of toddlers' motivation to help and are shown videos of early helping, and it is suggested that starting at about 12 months, children's early years are crucial for parents to guide their motivation to help as they grow. Parents are encouraged to work against UWEC tendencies to separate children from household endeavors and parental expertise by noticing and welcoming toddlers' interest in helping and encouraging toddlers' presence when doing household work. To capitalize on toddlers' enthusiasm and support their agency in making real contributions, parents are given tools to engage in high-quality time by viewing chores as an opportunity to collaborate and support toddler's bids to help when possible (Coppens & Rogoff, 2021; Coppens et al., 2016). Parents learn how toddlers can thereby benefit on many different levels and may start on a developmental trajectory of increased helping based upon a foundation of early experiences (Coppens & Rogoff, 2021). To frame chores as collaborative acts toward group goals, parents are encouraged to focus on including toddlers in work that benefits others and the family and when children contribute, to recognize how their participation benefits others. To support parents in that, during RHT parents are asked to reflect on daily household tasks they do as acts of caring that benefit the family.

Parents are also encouraged to allow toddlers' choice in when and how to help when appropriate, and to accommodate/guide toddlers' attempts to help. In this way, parents may be able to work against a UWEC tendency to control, assign and coerce participation, and instead to work with toddlers' existing motivation (Coppens et al., 2014; Coppens et al., 2016; Coppens & Rogoff, 2021; Coppens et al., 2020; Klein & Goodwin, 2013; Rogoff et al., 1993). It is suggested that parents attend to when children show enthusiasm to help spontaneously, and impart parental expertise when toddlers need guidance – i.e., guide vs. control (Coppens et al., 2014). Just as Gaskins (2000) found that children in a Yucatec Maya community are generally not allowed to participate until they already have some competence, it is suggested that parents not allow too much disruption in completing the task and that parents focus on the goal of getting the task done. In RHT, parents are also discouraged from rewarding children for specific acts of helping based upon evidence that toddlers did not increase helping in response to contingent rewards, and sometimes decreased helping after receiving rewards for doing so (Coppens et al., 2014; Warneken & Tomasello, 2008; Warneken et al., 2007).

Elements to enhance parent engagement were also integral to RHT: parents are assumed to act in what they believe to be the child's best interests. The training presents some ideas for why the UWEC 'constellation' of practices makes sense according to the set of beliefs that: there are major limits to what is possible, and toddlers are not motivated to

help – interpretations of toddlers' behaviors, abilities and potential that are common in UWEC families (Coppens & Rogoff, 2021; Coppens et al., 2020). It is stressed that UWEC practices make sense according to those common beliefs, but that those beliefs and practices need an update according to extensive cross-cultural literature, to better align with parents' values for raising helpful toddlers. While openly acknowledging cultural differences, an assumption of all parents' good intentions and RHT's focus on specific daily practices potentially reduces stigma that is common in parenting trainings about whether any given parent is a 'good' parent or not.

### 3.7. Protocol

The 2-week research protocol consisted of a pre-test, RHT training session, and a 2-week follow-up period. Parents who answered ads/emails were asked to indicate their availability on an online calendar, and those who did were asked to complete the online pre-test before RHT training. In a session lasting approximately 90 minutes, the training was delivered by 1 of 2 experienced parent educators: the program developer/first author, or a Cooperative Extension Family Educator from a rural area trained in RHT by the first author. RHT training took place online with 2 or more parents who saw a video of a PowerPoint presentation with slides using text at a 9th grade Fleisch Kincade reading level, videos embedded, and with live facilitation of brief parent reflections and discussion periods throughout. Parents made an action plan at the end of the training to outline changes they wanted to make at home, and after the training filled out an evaluation and post training session survey within 24 h after the training, and a daily log for 2 weeks. Parents completed weekly questionnaires and weekly (total of 2) phone interviews with the first author/program developer to determine and address any obstacles to using RHT strategies. Parent and interviewer decided on appropriate adjustments to the action plan, and clarified next steps for the coming week, or for the future. Parents received \$20 upon completion of the experimental protocol.

The University of Wisconsin–Madison IRB approved the study protocol. Participation was voluntary and online consent to participate was obtained from the participants.

## 4. Measures

### 4.1. Caregiver demographics, history, and contexts

Pretests included questions regarding parent education, gender identity of parent and child, self-described ethnicity, self-described race (s), and national heritage.

### 4.2. Feasibility and acceptability

Feasibility was defined as the majority of parents: a) completing the full protocol, and b) being willing to implement training suggestions, as determined in parent report during interviews. Parent ratings on online 5-point Likert-type questions were used to compute parent satisfaction for 13 of 30 participants, with options: "Very Satisfied – It was really good; Pretty Satisfied – It was ok; Not Very Satisfied – It was not that great; Not At All Satisfied – It was bad," and for the other 17 parents the scale was changed to a 10-point sliding scale to align with other qualitative measure changes that are not a topic of this paper. All parents were also assessed for c) accurately reporting main RHT concepts in an open-ended online question "What are 3 main points of the training?" Main points were: 1) toddlers like to help, 2) toddlers are able to help, 3) early toddlerhood practices are important and contribute to the long-term development of helping, and 4) facilitating toddler participation can be high-quality time together. Within 24 h and two weeks afterward, parents answered questions regarding the training's main points and their intentions to implement or continue implementing RHT strategies, which were also evaluated via qualitative data. Feasibility was also

assessed by considering ease of recruiting, sample diversity, and retention.

#### 4.3. Daily logs

Daily logs were used as an element of the training, to reinforce parents' intentions to take up RHT suggestions. Daily logs covered the past 24 h and asked parents to briefly rate children's mood by choosing one of three options: "Bad", "So so", or "Good" with an option to describe further, to briefly describe the child's routine (open-ended), to list all chores the parent had done, and briefly answer the following prompts, which also requested further description: "Did your child show interest?"; "Did you do anything to engage your child?". Parents listed the time they and the child spent on the chore, how the helping behavior started, children's activities before the chore and during if they didn't help, and whether/how long children watched the chore. A final *yes/no* question asked whether their child helped anybody in another way, i.e., not related to chores, and to describe. Parent interviews were used to assess whether daily logs were helpful in implementing the training, and the number of logs filled out by each parent was tabulated.

#### 4.4. Initial indications of secondary RHT effects: parenting self-efficacy (PSE)

To test whether PSE changed after RHT, the 13-item Being a Mother Scale (BaM-13; Matthey, 2011), a validated self-report scale using 4-point Likert items, was taken at posttest – at the end of the 2-week follow-up, to compare with baseline scores. Items were adjusted to add the word 'toddler' and to replace "mother" with "parent/caregiver," e.g., *I have felt confident about looking after my baby/toddler; I have found it hard to cope when my baby/toddler cries; I have felt lonely or isolated; and I worry I am not as good as other parents/caregivers.* We are not aware of other research taking this approach with the BaM-13; however, it meets a need to be more inclusive in parenting research and avoid gender essentialism (e.g., Park & Banchevsky, 2019). The BaM-13 rates highly in content validity, internal consistency, construct validity, and responsiveness relative to other self-report PSE measures for parents of children from 12- to 48- months of age (Wittkowski et al., 2017). Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.89 for mothers, 0.78 for fathers.

#### 4.5. Initial indications of primary RHT effects: qualitative data probing practices, beliefs, other benefits, and mechanisms

To detect changes that parents attributed to RHT and explore preliminary indications of benefits and potential mechanisms, qualitative data were collected in open-ended questionnaires administered online about practices and beliefs at pre- and posttest, in questions regarding changes parents experienced in the posttest taken 2 weeks after the group RHT training session, and in 1- and 2-week follow-up phone interviews. Change questions are listed in Table 3.

Phone interviews began with open-ended questions, such as: *'How did the week go?'* Follow-up questions probed RHT-relevant experiences, e.g., *'Were you able to use any strategies or suggestions from the training?'* (And if so) *'How did that go?'*, *'Can you give me an example?'*, etc. The interviewer/ asked questions to clarify what the parent had said and what had happened, and asked if there were any other examples of elements the parent had described. The interviewer also asked about any elements of the training not mentioned by the parent – e.g., how the child got involved in helping in specific examples and whether parents had done anything to encourage it, what the material setup was like for different events, if parents had been able to plan to do at least some chores when children are home, etc.

## 5. Analysis

### 5.1. Coding: deductive analyses

Major research questions of this work are whether RHT is feasible and shows preliminary indications of efficacy. To allow an explicit focus on RHT training components and aims, a deductive coding approach was adopted using template analysis (King, 1998). Template analysis and its flexibility allowed researchers to use *a priori* themes tied to previous literature, RHT components, and RHT goals. At the same time, because of the novelty of the training and its approach, the themes were iteratively checked and reworked with a focus on researcher reflexivity, to incorporate the diversity of processes and parent experiences involved.

The first author/program developer, the primary undergraduate coder, and the senior author, who supervised the research, identify as White and were raised in U.S. families with constellations of parenting practices close to that described here as UWEC. The UWEC background of the researchers may have sometimes facilitated the understanding of what many parents were working to change and some intricacies of how that might or might not work, but also limited understandings of nuances related to more collaborative practices and interactions and what best practices might look like. During coding meetings, coders were encouraged to think about and discuss their own assumptions and how they may be influencing coding, with the reminder to remain open to what parents had to say and what they may be trying to describe.

The coding structure and themes from previous work were also useful in helping coders raised within UWEC families better understand patterns that were not typical in their own upbringing, so that they may detect meaningful movement away from a UWEC pattern of socialization. An approach using more targeted *a priori* themes then functioned to ensure that researchers recognized the many aspects of a more collaborative approach to helping socialization, as a check for RHT's efficacy in terms of previous cross-cultural evidence, and to ensure coherence within a more global framework. The *a priori* themes were therefore considered as both an important structure used to consistently check for known patterns, and a framework to be inductively altered to reflect parents' unique experiences of taking RHT and using its strategies.

Themes, or categories of codes, were created *a priori* using parents' beliefs and practices previously identified and related to child helping (Alcalá et al., 2014; Coppens et al., 2016; Coppens & Rogoff, 2021; Ochs & Izquierdo, 2009; Ochs & Kremer-Sadlik, 2015). Categories included parent attributions of toddlers' actions and motivations as helping/attempting to help, toddlers as capable of helping and/or capable of helping with initiative, and parents' attributions of household work as an opportunity for 'quality time'. Additional themes related to parent practices were autonomy and agency allowed toddlers, and parents' framing of household work as group or collaborative efforts. These themes provided a coding structure, while the naming of them, and coding within these categories were not strictly deductive, and changed according to parents' descriptions of their unique experiences and perspectives, e.g., their experience of surprise in noticing toddlers' initiative and agency in helping. Codes were not mutually exclusive; for example, parents often attributed more than one motivation to their child, as was consistent with previous work (Coppens & Rogoff, 2021).

In the first stage of coding, the codebook was tested and adjusted by four undergraduate and two graduate student coders, all female, with no children, five White and one Asian. Coders coded independently and met weekly to agree upon codes. After eight weeks, coders met in pairs to compare their independent coding, and come to the larger group with any disagreements unable to be resolved in pairs. After this initial test and codebook adjustment, transcripts were coded by two primary coders from the original coding group – one undergraduate, along with the first author/program developer.

Final themes included: belief that toddlers want to help (Cohen's  $\kappa = 0.86$ ), belief that toddlers can help (Cohen's  $\kappa = 0.85$ ), and belief that

collaborating with them to do household work can be quality time (Cohen's  $\kappa = 0.72$ ). Practice-related themes were awareness of toddler interest and of opportunities to allow toddlers' helping, collaborating with toddlers, allowing autonomy and agency (Cohen's  $\kappa = 0.82$ ), and framing the experience as collaborative acts done together (Cohen's  $\kappa = 0.85$ ). Interview transcripts were also coded for parents expressing that they were translating their values into practice (Cohen's  $\kappa = 0.72$ ).

## 5.2. Coding: inductive analyses

While extensive research has described ethnographic differences in parent beliefs and practices related to children helping in the family, no work to our knowledge has examined the possibility of changing how parents socialize toddler helping. An inductive qualitative approach supported theory building with a focus on how parents experienced attempting to use suggested RHT strategies with their toddlers. An approach informed by grounded theory was adopted (Creswell et al., 2007), to focus on parent experiences, on any benefits they may or may not have found as a result, and what processes they felt underlay what they experienced.

The inductive coding process consisted of the first author and the primary undergraduate coder reading through all transcripts, conferring weekly regarding codes to be removed, changed, or added to the codebook via line-by-line coding and revisiting transcripts in an iterative process. Through memo writing and discussing codes and examining coders' assumptions, themes were formed, and methods adjusted accordingly – findings from the first 13 transcripts informed changes to the end of the interview protocol, namely, to ask parents explicitly about stress while doing chores with and without toddlers. In this way, data collection and coding were refined according to themes constructed from parents' experiences to increase analytic power (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021), while remaining more standardized throughout regarding training concepts and efficacy. Codes developed inductively included having more patience with toddlers, increased pride and confidence, and having more fun in daily life. These codes were then combined to create the theme of *High-Quality Parent-Child Interactions*. *Stress* (and its alleviation) was another added code and theme created, with subthemes of *Relax and Spend Time*, *Decreased Stress of Time Urgency*, and *Reframing What Chores Should Be*.

## 6. Results

### 6.1. Feasibility and acceptability

Thirty of 31 parents who completed the pretest and RHT training session finished the full protocol, for a final sample of  $N = 30$  and a retention rate of 96.8 %. Twenty nine out of 30 parents (96.7 %) accurately reported at least 2 main concepts from the training when asked an open-ended question within 24 h of the online group RHT training, and in the posttest 2-weeks later, 100 % of parents were able to correctly answer at least 3 out of 4 specific questions about RHT's main points, while 25 out of 30 (80.6 %), answered 4 out of 4 correctly. The number of parents recruited was reasonable compared to effort: 2 waves of emails were sent to 7 childcare and early education centers, including university-based centers. The racial diversity of the sample was similar to the U.S. population and more diverse than the study city. The education level of parents, however, was higher than the average U.S. population. (See Table 1).

Average parent ratings of RHT were 3.7 on a 4-point scale (*Pretty Satisfied to Very Satisfied*), or 8.9 on a 0–10-point scale, with a compiled average of 93.9 %. Thirty parents reported using RHT training strategies in their daily lives to some degree in interviews/essays.

### 6.2. Daily logs

On average, parents filled out 8.8/14 daily logs, range 0–14. Logs

provided event information that could be confirmed and probed for more detail during interviews. Daily logs showed promise as an element of the intervention; some parents reported them to be very helpful in allowing a period of reflection of what had happened with their toddlers, what opportunities they had missed, and what changes they wanted to make moving forward.

### 6.3. Preliminary indication of training effects: parenting self-efficacy (PSE)

A repeated-measures *t*-test indicated that out of 39 total points on the BAM13, average PSE scores at pre-test ( $M = 26$ ,  $SD = 7.2$ ) increased significantly at post-test 2 weeks later ( $M = 30$ ,  $SD = 6.0$ ), with a Cohen's *d* moderate-to-large effect size,  $t(28) = 3.792$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.58$ , with one 3SD outlier (+16) in difference scores removed. Post-hoc, the analysis was re-run without the  $n = 4$  fathers' data, yielding similar results:  $t(24) = 3.824$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.54$ .

### 6.4. Preliminary indication of training effects: qualitative evidence

Results were consistent with the assumption that even with varied baseline practices and beliefs, families were motivated to change toward aligning their practices with values to raise children who are helpful. In change questions and phone interviews, parents were not directly asked about RHT core concepts, yet qualitative analyses indicated that after participating in RHT, many parents had experienced changes in beliefs and practices targeted by RHT. Changes in core concepts generally fell into the categories of: 1) in cases when before RHT, parents had already recognized toddlers' tendencies in those areas, *increased awareness and attention* to toddlers' motivations, abilities, and initiative to help; 2) *changed perspectives* to recognize those tendencies anew; and/or 3) *reporting increases* in toddlers' motivation, proficiency, and/or initiative to help. Many parents also expressed movement toward regarding toddlers' participation in family endeavors as valuable and described adopting and expressing a collaborative mindset regarding such family work as a shared goal.

The next three sections present qualitative results regarding topics emphasized in RHT: toddlers' motivation and ability; toddlers' autonomy and agency; and learning to be a responsible, participating member of the family. These sections are followed by a final section presenting indications from qualitative data of potential mechanisms for increased PSE and other reported RHT benefits.

### 6.5. Toddlers' motivation and ability to help – positive attributions

Qualitative data indicated that many parents increased positive attributions of their toddlers in regarding their actions coming from a motivation to help, and in recognizing that they were able to help, in ways that were often beyond parents' prior expectations. In qualitative data, 25 out of 30 parents (83.3 %) spontaneously expressed that their toddler was interested in helping. Twenty parents (66.7 %) reported changes regarding that interest, while 67.7 % (20/30) of parents expressed changes regarding their toddler's ability to help.

### 6.6. Toddlers' motivation and ability to help – increased awareness and attention

Parents described bringing more awareness and attention to whether their toddler might be interested in what they were doing during household work, or *'thinking more about how [child] wants to help.'* Parents also described being more consistently aware of children's abilities. *"I think [child] knows I see [child]'s ability a little more now"* - this parent points out that increased awareness is not just an individual or static process: children respond to being seen as capable and this allows parents and children to co-create participation in the moment. Parents were able to attend to, confirm, and increase their view of toddlers as

motivated to help.

6.7. *Toddlers’ motivation and ability to help – changed perspectives*

Parents also reported a change in their attributions by reinterpreting toddlers’ intentions as trying to help vs. perceiving their toddler as ‘destructive’, or ‘deliberately trying to undo [parents’] hard work,’ and importantly, some parents relayed that this reinterpretation led to ‘less misunderstandings.’ A decrease in conflict would be expected if parents were previously misreading toddler’s attempts to help as deliberately disruptive, as described by another parent: there were “less meltdowns or frustration since I no longer try to discourage or stop [child] from engaging in a chore.’ And this new framing leads to a different focus of parents’ attention: ‘I’m now asking, “How is [child] trying to help right now?” instead of thinking “Oh [child]’s just getting in the way.” These new kinds of questions in turn allow new kinds of intentional responses to toddlers’ actions – refraining from discouraging children, and beyond. Instead of attributing disruptive or thoughtless reasons behind toddlers’ actions, a new take on toddler’s behavior was described by a parent as their toddler: ‘trying to help (and trying to spend time with me) and maybe in need of some guidance.’ For another parent, providing this kind of guidance was also coupled with a newfound appreciation of collaborating with their toddler: “I have also opened up the possibilities to adapt more chores to allow [child] to help...and value the time together in getting those tasks done.”

This process of re-attribution and intentional responding is presented in a detailed example that also explains how it prevented conflict and ended in a very fulfilling interaction. Also note the parents’ allowance of less-than-perfectly folded clothes, to get the task done and support the toddler’s participation:

...we were folding clothes on Sunday when we were listening to church, and I was folding them and [child] was coming and just kind of just rolling them all around. And I could see [my spouse] getting ready... getting agitated. [My spouse] was like, "What? No!" I stop, I look, I noticed, and I said, "Would you like to help me put those in the drawers?" And [child] says, "Yes!" So [child] picked them up, they were still kind of folded. They weren't necessarily perfect. And I opened the drawer for [child] and [child] put them in and [child] helped me do that several times. And so not only was [child] actually helping more helpful this time... [child] just seemed to really be into it.

Parents not only reported changing perspectives on toddler motivations and their attributions of children’s actions, but they also described reframing what their toddler could do. For another parent, understanding the child as more capable provided motivation to enact training suggestions: “I think that the most eye-opening thing was just watching the little girl hand the dishes [re: video 4 in RHT, see Table 2]. It’s like, OK, well, how do I actually do this in my life?” Attributions of toddlers as more capable were described by some as crucial in changing their responses to toddlers’ actions. And this parent conveyed that along with changing their responses to the child, the parent changed their view about how relevant the child’s contributions were:

Actually, [child]’s able to do more things than I previously kind of thought...it enables me to treat [child as if child]’s able to participate in a meaningful way.

Not only were parents realizing that children were more capable of doing actions that help, but they were also realizing that toddlers were more capable of taking the initiative to do so. In fact, they were sometimes taken by surprise: “[child] vacuumed! without even being asked - it was amazing!” and in another case, “...my family owns a store here in [town] and um there was a piece of merchandise that was kind of underneath a shelf. [Child] reached down there, picked it up and put it in the right spot. I couldn’t even believe it....” The fact that some parents saw children taking initiative to help after taking RHT but did not seem to recognize this ability previously is consistent with the hypothesis that parents had previously been missing, misinterpreting, or inadvertently discouraging

**Table 2**  
Raising helpful toddlers training content (approximately 1 h, 30 min).

Section and Content	Videos/Activity
3 min Introduction and ice breaker	
6 min Overview: Different outcomes across cultures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children do grow to help in the family from their own initiative in complex ways in many Indigenous heritage families of the Americas</li> <li>In many Euro-heritage families, there is much less voluntary helping across ages</li> </ul> Toddlers’ motivations and ability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Across cultures there is evidence that toddlers have the motivation and ability to help</li> <li>Video</li> </ul>	1. Video: <a href="#">Warneken and Tomasello (2006)</a> – a seminal study: videos show apparently European heritage toddlers of approximately 18 months of age in a German laboratory setting helping an experimenter by opening up a cabinet when the experimenter’s hands are full, picking up something that is dropped, etc.
5–8 min Intro to reflection/discussions and reflection/discussion #1 Has your child showed interest in helping at home? How, and what kinds of tasks?	Reflection: parents write answers independently Discussion: parents share their answers
5 min UWEC mismatch between values and practice Difference in beliefs about toddler motivation, what they can do, and age they should participate. What parents’ roles are as a result. Introduce self-care chores vs. work for the benefit of others. Research presented. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How and why parents might be doing it in different ways - videos, parent reasons</li> </ul>	Videos of UWEC practices with apparently European Moms and toddlers <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mom scrubbing floor, child discouraged from helping. Mom says she doesn’t want to ‘torture’ child - implicit assumption is that force is required. Point out that the video depicts toddler enthusiasm and insistence to help.</li> <li>Mother doesn’t interact with child while doing chores and toddler disrupts. If parent believes toddler is not motivated to help, and unable to help in meaningful way, this response is reasonable. Introduce the idea that toddler might be trying to help but not able to do it well. This belief would lead to different actions.</li> <li>Video of more collaborative practices with apparently European heritage Mom and toddler interacting to get work done: baby in a onesie standing by dishwasher and handing dishes to mom. Facilitator discusses differences with Video 1 and 2: Interaction, guidance, learning. Getting task done while having fun. Discussion of setup, parents instructed to think of own home and adjustments that would allow toddler participation.</li> </ol>
<b>Section and Content (Continued)</b>	<b>Videos/Activity (Continued)</b>
4.5-7 min Reflection/Discussion #2 What do you do when your child shows interest in helping? Why?	Reflection: parents write answers independently Discussion: parents share their answers
13 min Toddler participation in household tasks is quality time – skills and benefits learned <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Early STEM learning (video 4)</li> <li>Physical development (video 4)</li> <li>Social Emotional Learning (video 4)</li> </ul> Suggestion: No contingent rewards for helping, intrinsic motivation	
5-8 min Reflection/Discussion #3 How do the chores you do benefit others? List examples and describe	Reflection: parents write answers independently Discussion: parents share their answers

(continued on next page)



**Table 2** (continued)

Section and Content	Videos/Activity
2 min Supporting toddler helping Seeing toddlers' actions as unskilled bids to help - guiding children's efforts	
3 min 3 brief parenting tips: • Tantrums – patience and empathy. Child's physical coordination may not match understanding, e.g., can understand language before able to speak. • Positive parenting - give guidance about what to do as well as what not to do • Recognize and support effort to support learning	
4 min Supporting toddler helping • Videos	Videos: Revisit UWEC videos #2 and #3 Seeing toddlers' actions as unskilled bids to help - how parents could guide children's efforts instead
6.5-9 min Reflection/Discussion #4 Mismatch and Collaborative Learning elements • Which elements of the mismatch model do you experience at home? • How can you move toward collaborative learning for that element?	Reflection: parents write answers independently Discussion: parents share their answers
17 min Specific tips and strategies • Recognize bids to help, welcome • Make child aware, invite, schedule • Support: Adjust pace, setup, guide if needed • Collaboration, togetherness, autonomy	
Section and Content (Continued)	Videos/Activity (Continued)
6-9 min Reflection/Discussion #5 • Display list of potential developmentally appropriate tasks • Pick 2 chores, make a plan to support toddler's initiative	Reflection: parents write answers independently Discussion: parents share their answers
6 min Overview, Summary, Thank You	Next Steps in Research Protocol

toddler's bids to help.

As these quotes illustrate, an important, common theme in parents' discourse went beyond positive attributions: their views of what children could do and why were more accurate, thereby allowing them to better guide toddlers toward doing actions that were actually helpful. Toddlers have the chance to learn how to actually help, and were better positioned to initiate helping in the future.

While a vast majority of parents expressed recognizing toddlers' helping motivation more or seeing it for the first time, it was also clear that not every parent came away from RHT convinced that their toddlers were motivated by intentions to help, or able to intentionally help. Parents across toddler ages expressed a range of attitudes in follow-up.

**Table 3**

Training-related change questions at post-test.

1. Did you change the way you think of your child because of the training? (If 'yes,' please describe):
2. Changes in my child because of the training (if any):
3. Changes in me because of the training (if any):
4. Changes in the relationship between my child and me because of the training (if any):
5. Changes in the way things go around the house because of the training (if any):
6. What is good about the changes you have made because of the training (anything you didn't write yet)?
7. What is not so good about the changes you have made because of the training (anything you didn't write yet)?
8. Please explain the way you have changed doing chores with your child because of the training:

Two parents explicitly said that they believed toddlers were not motivated by an intention to help, others tended to rephrase children's actions from 'helping', as the interviewer had said, to being driven by affiliation, curiosity, play, exploration, etc. (see Coppens et al., 2020), and some parents seemed conflicted or uncertain. Notably, parents often supported their toddler's participation, nonetheless. Additionally, parents suggested obstacles to RHT strategies that are in line with the literature (Ochs & Kremer-Sadlik, 2013): many parents spent 1–3 h with their child on weekdays at a time when parents were busy with dinner and bedtime activities that were time limited. Some of those parents were still able to change some practices during weekdays while others focused more exclusively on weekends.

Even with these reported limitations, many parents presented a picture of changing the way they saw their toddler's actions toward seeing potentially unskilled bids to help, a change allowed by more positive and accurate attributions of what toddlers could do and why. For many, a positive feedback loop resulted as they responded differently and saw toddlers' actions as meaningful and real contributions to accomplishing household tasks.

### 6.8. Toddlers' motivation and ability to help – toddler changes

Parents' changed attributions of children and changed responses to their actions often seemed to change what children did in turn. Many parents described an obvious increase in toddlers' interest: "since we have become more encouraging and engaging about involving [child] in chores, [child] has expressed more interest in helping." Some parents also thought that toddlers were more confident or proficient in contributing to different household tasks two weeks after training: "...it seems like maybe [child]'s just able to do a little bit more [themselves]? Or [child] just seems a little more confident in doing it," and another: "...I feel like that kind of turned into - [child] kind of knows what to do now." Parents also described new routines that toddlers and parents adopted, such as the flicking the light switch on when entering the room or the toddler insisting on pressing the start button for the coffee every morning.

A parent who had included her child in chores before taking RHT also described changes in what her child did around the house:

Since we have become more encouraging and engaging about involving [child] in chores, [child] has expressed more interest in helping and has become better at sharing with [child]'s older sister. [Child] also seems to be proud of figuring out some of the more complicated chores now that we let [child] work longer at it and demonstrate how to do the chores when [child] has problems.

Here the parent seemed to be improving scaffolding yet in a more subtle way that prioritizes autonomy – letting the child have more time and guiding the trouble areas, and reported toddlers' increased proficiency as a result, as well as the toddler having pride in their accomplishments.

RHT was designed considering the connection between changing parent perspectives, increasing their awareness, and the possibility of changing toddlers as a result. This parent summarized one example: "...

before the training, I didn't read [child] right when [child] would come over to see what I (was) doing or get into things I was working (on). Now I know [child] may be interested in helping out...I notice [child]'s interest more but perhaps [child] is more interested in help(ing) more too."

#### 6.9. Supporting toddlers' autonomy and agency

As illustrated above in parent reports of toddlers initiating chores, some parents also described children taking more initiative to help than before RHT (50 %). Those parents changed perspectives based upon their newfound awareness of toddlers taking initiative to help.

#### 6.10. Supporting toddlers' autonomy and agency - toddler changes

Parents sometimes explicitly described changes in their toddlers as well. For example, "My child is now more actively seeking to get involved in different activities I am doing," "[Child] has started suggesting to me that we do chores (especially vacuum) because [child] enjoys them so much. It's motivating for me, too!" And: "[child] [them]self initiates and [child] [them] self tries to participate. So, it's like, we are doing whatever [makes child] happy."

#### 6.11. Supporting toddlers' autonomy and agency - co-creation and parent changes

Co-creation of participation through interacting in the moment suggests an array of changes, as expressed by this parent: "Now, I have more confidence in my child's ability to learn through observation instead of needing to be told what to do all the time. I can also see [child]'s inherent desire to help others more and encouraging that in [child] has brought it out (and made me more aware when I see it)."

Other parents described having more openness to the child's agency in helping: "I will invite [child] to help and not push it if [child] is not interested. I am less structured about how [child] can help and will provide more guidance as needed. I think [child] is more aware of opportunities to help and I think [child] considers helping on [child]'s own," and "I just think I've just become more open to trying things with [child], letting [child] do more. [Child] clearly gets a kick out of it. It's just been interesting to see [child] get excited and be more involved." Notably, one parent described that "[Child] will jump into a chore without asking much more frequently than before this training." Another parent expressed concern that they and their spouse might have been "overbearing parents that are kind of always there," and that RHT motivated them to "just kind of give [child] a little bit more space" and adopt an attitude of "all right, I'm gonna see what [child] can figure out here." That parent described watching the child "figure it out" and allowing the child more independence outside of household work contexts. In a variety of ways, parents reported seeing and allowing more toddler agency.

Some parents shifted their broader appraisals of children: "I was thinking of [child] as someone I need to care for but now, I think of [child] as someone that can also provide me with some support" and: "I now see [child] as a helper, not just somebody in need of help."

#### 6.12. Inclusion, collaboration, and togetherness: learning to be a responsible, participating member of the family

A first step in moving toward more collaborative learning in the family would be parents' perceiving family work (aka "chores") as 'quality time,' or an opportunity for children to develop in a positive direction with parental guidance when toddlers participate. Qualitative data did suggest that many parents newly considered toddlers' inclusion in household work as quality time – 20/30 (66.7 %) of parents indicated such a shift, and this was true for parents with an array of beliefs and practices before participating in RHT. In RHT, parents were also encouraged to think of household work as a family endeavor, as shared goals toward which all family members contribute with a sense of

togetherness. A majority of parents, 23 out of 30 (76.7 %), reported talking or thinking in a more collaborative way about doing household work. Parents' descriptions of these changes introduced themes of increased patience with toddlers, decreased stress, possibly less screen time and better sleep for the toddler, and commonly, simply being able to spend more time and becoming closer to toddlers.

#### 6.13. Inclusion, collaboration, and togetherness - increased awareness and attention

Parents reported becoming more aware of opportunities for toddlers' inclusion, and opportunities to support their initiative. A parent who described including children in chores pre-RHT in interviews reported: "it was just a nice refresher/reminder to build in the additional time and energy it may take to invite or welcome my kiddo's help."

Often, greater awareness of opportunities to include toddlers stemmed from changed perspectives of toddlers: "I started to think of [child] as more capable, more willing, and more interested in chores. I stopped thinking about distracting [child] while I do chores and started thinking of ways to include [child] more." A common theme in parent interviews and essays was parents' increased efforts to include the child.

#### 6.14. Inclusion, collaboration, and togetherness - changed perspectives

When parents talked about newly regarding household work and including toddlers as quality time, they often did so in terms of getting to know each other better – simply spending more time with toddlers, engaging with them, and bonding or becoming closer. As this parent explains: "I have reframed how I think about chores myself (from something 'stressful and overwhelmingly' [sic] to something that can bring me closer to my children and be a source of quality time..."

Another aspect of reframing doing chores as potential quality time was the sense of doing something good for their child, and the ability to teach and learn skills while interacting. One parent expressed having more patience: with the new realization that doing chores together can be quality time, chores became valued time spent together (see Table 4 for quotes).

There was some indication that parents included toddlers in more than just doing chores, as parents talked about including child in 'everything' and thinking consistently about what the child may be interested in doing and how to 'make it more accessible.' In this way, as another parent also describes, the separation between adult and child worlds was decreased: "rather than being swept away during household chores, [child] is being brought in." Some parents also described newfound freedom from the parental burden of distracting their toddler or having to put off the task and reserve time later to do it when the child would not be present. One parent described this freedom in terms of being able to 'engage with [child]...while I do whatever I need to do.' Some specifics about what this togetherness looked like in daily life were elaborated by another parent: "I feel myself pulling [child] toward me more instead of pushing [child] away...and just say, 'OK, well, let's try to do this together,' as opposed to "Let me get this done so that we can spend time together. And [child] has responded well to that." These examples also suggest decreased stress from better interactions and less time stress.

Parents also talked about thinking of doing chores as working for the benefit of family with a sense of togetherness and incorporating that concept into how they talked to and supported toddlers. The theme of togetherness introduced above was connected to including the child and decreasing separation. Similarly, other parents expressed: "we are working together, we are playing together, ... and getting things done together" and "we're more likely to do chores as a family."

Another parent who had talked about including their toddler in chores pre-RHT described making changes to highlight the prosocial nature of chores: "I use more inclusive language such as talking about how the chores benefit everyone instead of just talking about taking care of things for [themselves]." This comment maps onto research presented in RHT that

**Table 4**  
Parent quotes illustrating key themes.

Topics/Themes	Parent Quotes
<b>Toddlers' Motivation and Ability to Help: Positive Attributions; Changed perspectives.</b>	<p>"...less misunderstandings or me thinking [child]'s being destructive. I've changed from thinking that [child]'s a nuisance or that [child]'s deliberately trying to undo my hard work. Now I reframe [child]'s actions as trying to help (and trying to spend time with me) and maybe in need of some guidance."</p> <p>"I see how [child] interacts with our household in a different way. I'm now asking 'How is [child] trying to help right now?' instead of thinking 'Oh [child]'s just getting in the way.'</p> <p>"It helped me to see [child] as a more capable helper - there is so much [child] can help with that is developmentally appropriate."</p>
<b>Inclusion, Collaboration, and Togetherness: Learning to be a responsible, participating member of the family; Changed perspectives.</b>	<p>"One of the things that's been also really helpful is ... understanding that is quality time.... I was really reflective of that last week during the training. ... I've always just seen [them]...playing and doing ... workbooks and things like that (as) the true quality time. But seeing chores as quality time too allows me to be more patient because we are spending time together and that is time for us to learn different skills, and so it was helpful this week to kind of take a step back and realize that is good for [child]..."</p> <p>"... it kind of gave it a nice focus ...to say, 'OK, what can we do to make it more accessible? 'What can we do?' 'How do we talk about this? How do we include [child] in everything? Everything!'"</p> <p>"And that's been nice to not think 'I can't do this right now when [child]'s here.' If [child]'s there, then I know I can try to engage with [child]. Instead of, like, trying to distract [child] with something else or have someone else watch over [child] while I do whatever I need to do."</p> <p>"I feel myself pulling [child] toward me more instead of pushing [child] away. [Pre-RHT doing dishes with child]: ...[child]'s getting water everywhere. I'm worried about [child] falling, hurting [themselves]. And so, I - you know, I push [child] away, I sit [child] down, I tell [child], 'No, don't do that.' And [child] gets frustrated and then I get frustrated.... Instead [post-RHT], I've been really trying to bring [child] towards me, not just physically, but just in terms of emotionally and just say, "OK, well, let's try to do this together," as opposed to "Let me get this done so that we can spend time together. And [child] has responded well to that."</p>
<b>Translating Values into Everyday Practice.</b>	<p>"I haven't done much parenting training, right? and you just sort of like parent on the fly. And so, I think that this is a really nice time to sort of connect with, like, what are your goals and motivations and how do you actually think about your interaction with your child? So. I think that it's been really helpful for me, in terms of just paradigm shifting."</p>

UWEC parents focused on 'self-care' chores as opposed to Indigenous heritage families who emphasized doing whatever needed to be done for the family (Alcalá et al., 2014; Coppens et al., 2014; Coppens et al., 2016). This quote also calls into question how much this parent changed the nature of children's participation away from self-care activities vs. simply changing how they are described, as some parents talked about

how even self-care chores help the family in some sense.

An other-oriented focus was more clear for some parents who described a shift toward thinking of household work as an opportunity to support children to act for the benefit of family and other people: "I mind chores less because they are an opportunity to interact with [child] and I think more about them now as helping others....I love the idea of chores being a way to show love to one another (and to our future selves)." Another parent explained, "we want to make sure our children do chores, but not just for the sake of ...punishment ... it's about community. We live all together. This is our home. We all have to do our part to take care of it." Parents' descriptions of focusing on helping the group, with a sense of mutual responsibility and togetherness suggest that one reason chores became less stressful was because they became more meaningful.

As another parent shared, "...so we can all do it together in a good way or we can continue to like, you know, feel burnt out by the burdens of the tasks of work and trying to get everything done" and later elaborated to say, "I also have lightened up and shifted my paradigm to chores being less lonely or tiresome and more about our family as a group and done from love and to help and remembered [sic] the gift of being able to do them." Here as above, chores become more of an expression of love and an experience of togetherness, vs. one of loneliness, but also these parents suggest that they became a reminder of what might be parents' goals in child-rearing and life.

#### 6.15. Inclusion, collaboration, and togetherness - toddler changes

Toddler changes were often not explicitly discussed in terms of collaboration and togetherness. An exception was a parent who had admitted to consistently including their child in chores before taking RHT – and felt guilty about it as being 'indulgent'. They described toddler changes after RHT as connected to the parent's recognizing toddler's initiative and potential and regarding their inclusion in household work as worthwhile. The parent felt validated, and they became motivated to do what they had already been doing more and better:

I feel better about my parenting skills, I see more opportunities for bonding and spending time with my kids, now that I am comfortable that chores are an acceptable activity for toddlers. I think I let [child] be more independent now that I recognize that [child] is showing initiative to help with chores, and I recognize that [child] has the capacity to help and learn and grow from the time [child] spends with me doing the chores. The toddlers are doing more chores and getting better at them.

In sum, parents did seem to resonate with the research-based rationale presented in RHT regarding toddlers' motivation and abilities to help, and the benefits of changing their practices accordingly. Parents described both recognizing attempts children had made before and creating new situations with their child by recognizing and guiding toddlers' enthusiasm to help. In this way, parent descriptions suggest how knowledge and practices might be co-created within unique situational factors. Parents had started with varying pre-existing levels of RHT-suggested practices and beliefs. Some parents had missed their toddlers' interest in helping before RHT, others had recognized and/or supported it but did so more after RHT. Evidence suggested that after RHT, parents did more recognizing, attending to, and supporting children's interests and efforts to help. Doing so may make children's interests and efforts more successful and more frequent, which were results also reported by parents.

#### 6.16. Benefits and potential mechanisms

Parents described a variety of benefits, many of which were not explicitly predicted. For example, the predicted increase in parents' stress (due to the added effort required to implement RHT strategies) was reported occasionally, yet it was much more common for parents to

report reduced overall stress from using RHT strategies. Parents' experience of varied benefits suggested potential mechanisms for how and why RHT may have been effective. Inductive and deductive qualitative analyses provided evidence for the hypothesized mechanism of *Translating Values into Practice*, with a variety of values described by parents, and for the inductively derived mechanism of *High-Quality Parent-Child Interactions*.

**Translating Values into Everyday Practice.** Two thirds of parents (20/30; 66.7 %), described RHT helping them enact established goals in everyday life, which is consistent with the hypothesis that parent values would motivate them to change practices. Evidence supported designing for fidelity with flexibility: the values parents described varied, thereby elaborating many aspects of what toddlers helping with agency might mean for each parent and child.

Parent reports are consistent with the idea that helping is ubiquitously viewed as a desirable way for children to interact:

...these are kind of ideas that I want to think about and implement anyway and going through this all put some more emphasis on thinking about it more on a day-to-day basis, as opposed to kind of an abstract concept of, oh I'd like [child] to be helpful. Instead, I'm actually like, oh, I should encourage [child] to come help me do what I'm doing right now.... I think [child helping]'s another way to be thoughtful, which is something I'm always striving for.

Another parent shared, "*What you want for them as a human - you see that happening.*"

**Intentional Parenting.** Some parents seemed to benefit from remembering/experiencing parenting as an intentional act. When asked what changes they found in themselves because of the training, one parent responded, "... [I have a] *more values-aligned perspective on parenting and more intentional parenting around chores.*" Another described RHT as giving them a chance to connect with their parenting '*goals and motivations.*'

Interviews did not explicitly ask about putting values into practice. Nonetheless, many parents did emphasize their child's development of helping or prosociality as a value and the purpose for appreciating RHT - e.g., 'doing service' in the world. There were also a host of other values and goals parents described. For one parent, RHT helped them make smaller adjustments to '*hone my skills*' of already-existing practices of including toddlers in chores, by '*being more mindful of what exactly I'm saying, to make sure I'm using the right words and phrases for what I want to get across.*' Another parent said RHT helped them enact mindful parenting and alignment with a value of mutual care:

...just from my own sort of emotional understanding about.... why I do the things that I do, like clean my house - it's been a helpful reminder.... I think it aligns with what we're trying to do - saying, 'we're doing this to help and care for one another and ourselves;' it aligns with what I'm trying to do.

**Parenting toward the future and in connection with the past.** Another common theme parents expressed was aligning immediate practices with long- term goals, whether they were raising a responsible adult: "*I see it as a long-term investment in [child]'s future as a responsible adult and [member of] our family,*" or whether those goals were prosociality: "*The long-term goal is a huge motivating factor - prosocial engagement,*" and "*I think that having [child] help with chores now will increase the likelihood that [child] will engage in behaviors that help others as [child] gets older.*" As one parent put it:

I think the most important thing is that we are learning to carry [child] along, and we understand that this is the best time to start... training and guiding [child] towards what we eventually want [child] to get used to in the future, and not just all of a sudden expecting [child] to be magical and start doing things.

This parent talked about RHT encouraging them to guide their

toddler toward future goals, and thereby demonstrated that they took to heart the RHT evidence that starting early with toddlers matters for toddlers' future development. Note that the concept of the effectiveness of starting early brings up the idea that before RHT, parents may have been inadvertently withholding their guidance, knowledge, and expertise from toddlers.

The following parent also suggested RHT helped them align practices with goals involving ancestors and cultural connection:

The things that we really liked was that...this comes from Mayan culture, part of our ancestral heritage. And so, we've been all about that lately.... So, this just felt perfect and kind of really aligned with our values.... And I think this is really helpful...this is how we actually do it in a way that's going to be more intuitive and... organic. This is an actual way to do it.

**Saying 'No' less.** Some parents expressed being better able to enact the parenting goal of saying 'no' less after RHT participation, and the theme as well as their descriptions suggest more sensitivity to children's cues, better responsiveness, and enabling better scaffolding from being able to consider and accommodate children's bids to help in the moment:

I do think it has made a slight change in our relationship. We are often telling [child] 'No' for behavior we do not want to reinforce, but I do feel like we are telling [child]'No' a little bit less.

Below, a parents' story about saying 'No' less suggests that mechanisms for newly aligning values for mindful parenting with everyday practice may include pausing in the moment to reflect on options for responding, options presented in RHT. A more intentional response becomes possible:

I feel so bad because I was like, I'm not going to be one of those parents that says 'Stop' and 'No' all the time, but I end up saying 'Stop' and 'No' all the time!" ... Now that I've gone through this training, ...there's like this pause before I respond to say, 'OK,' - normally I would just say 'Stop! No, stop.' But then I'm like, 'Do you want to help me?' I mean, it's ..., it's so, it's so different.... I pause before I react. It gives me that space to think about, OK. There might be another way in which we can engage with each other than 'Stop' or 'No,' which is sometimes necessary, it gives you that pause. It gives you that beat before you react.

This parent gives a good rendition of RHT providing tools for them to enact already-existing values, supporting the hypothesis that such values were the motivation driving some parents to take up RHT suggestions. Another parent described intentions to establish a mutuality of helping as coupled with saying 'yes' more, and suggests they had more response options after RHT:

Another thing is I've noticed that [child] will ask me to help, and before I used to say 'No' a lot because there were things where I knew that [child] could not do them [themselves]. But so now I try to say 'Yes' to [child] to as well to show that we're both helping each other.

These results suggest a diversity of experiences from using RHT strategies, based upon a wide variety of baseline practices and beliefs, and suggest a pattern of parents more closely aligning their daily practices to their values and parenting goals. Despite the diversity in goals, the commonality threading through responses is that parents are better able to move themselves toward how they want to parent, often by having more options for responding to children, and move their child's development in a positive direction - in other words, increased parenting self-efficacy.

**High-quality Parent-Child Interactions - A Framework of Mutual Support.** Saying 'no' less, being more mindful and intentional, and parenting for the long run suggest some ways parent-child interactions may have improved. Parent report suggests that RHT may have given them new ideas for thinking about and interacting with their



toddler. Inductive analyses suggested that higher-quality parent-child interactions may have been a mechanism by which RHT benefitted families, as well as being a benefit itself. This finding also indicates other aspects of RHT and Indigenous heritage parenting described in previous studies that may be important to the well-being of families – more actual and figurative togetherness within a framework of mutual support.

Parent reports on how their interactions with their toddlers improved also point to other inter-related potential mechanisms: increased patience, more fun and positive engagement, and increased pride and confidence of both parents and toddlers. These results seemed to have been linked to parents' adopting the core concepts of RHT and suggest that parents were expressing and acting upon more positive attributions of children's actions as stemming from a motivation to help, and from their ability to help with initiative, and/or the potential to do so. These findings are consistent with the hypothesis that parents were responding differently to children with more sensitivity, warmth, positivity, and a sense of togetherness.

This example indicates that there were varied benefits based upon families' unique situations and styles, as was the aim in designing RHT for fidelity and flexibility:

I feel like I've been engaging more one on one with [child] in a constructive way instead of just like a robotic, like – I'm following you, doing whatever you want to do, which is very draining. And when you're able to focus on something *with* [child], it is like such a better flow to the day. You know, it's energizing instead of draining. Because you're, you know, teaching [child] and [child]'s engaged and I think that - because I would definitely use screens a lot, you know - I'm cooking dinner. I need to get the laundry folded. And I don't want you to come in here and mess everything up that I've just done. So, we were using screens a lot, especially because [child] wasn't at school. And I was, like, just so exhausted from toddler duty, 16 h a day. But now that we're kind of, we're not using screens as much and I feel like that one-on-one interaction, along with being physically active and not like watching a screen, is much more healthy, physically healthy for [child] and maybe is contributing to the better nighttime sleep.

Note that this parent's interpretation of the commonly suggested best practice of child-directed play in everyday life became draining vs. an interactive approach in which parents' greater skills and learning can be passed along within the context of achieving group goals – doing things together. Sharing goals also decreased separation of child and adult worlds that previously resulted in using screen time so the parent could get housework done.

**Patience.** Some parents reported having more patience with their child when doing household work, which is consistent with evidence that many parents increased positive perceptions of their toddlers' intentions, abilities, and/or how worthwhile it is to spend time collaborating to get household work done. Greater patience for one parent came with including the child more and more togetherness:

While my [child] can't articulate it in words, I think [child] has noticed that I am more engaging and patient with [child] and that I want [child] around me instead of pushing [child] away. We have a better relationship and I'm less stressed about it all.

For another parent, more patience came from adopting a core concept from RHT: the value of doing housework collaboratively, as quality time: *"I do believe that seeing chores as quality time has been extremely valuable. Additionally, it has given me the space to be more patient with [child] in getting things done!"*

**More enjoyment, fun, happiness, and positive engagement.** Parents reported themselves and/or their child enjoying interactions more, often mutually. As parents put it: *"We have more fun for more of the day than we did before," "I think [child] enjoys the more interactions we have during chores,"* and *"I think we'll all be happier in the long run."* One parent described:

I enjoy spending the time with [child] doing housework/chores... I am directly spending time with [child] when [child] is helping, instead of doing something parallel to [child]. When [child] is doing something with me, it is easier to watch what [child] is doing because [child] is in my sight and we are doing the same thing. It is great to see [child] be able to help. I think [child] feels very proud when [child] does this!

This portrayal of daily life depicts a parent who is getting to know their child better in the context of also getting work done for the household, as opposed to working/playing in "parallel." It takes time to exclusively play with the child; here, in the extra time of collaborating, the parent gains a better understanding of what the child can do, how they can contribute to the group, and what potential there might be for them to develop further. This kind of interaction may increase PSE, and along with the increased enjoyment and ease may be a mechanism for reducing stress.

Many parents also painted a picture of children being more deeply engaged, happy and even thriving when helping:

I realized [child] wants to be part of our lives at every level and believes [child] has something valuable to offer. [Child] really thrives when [child] gets to help. [Child] takes huge risks and really wants to do it [child]'s way and try before asking for help or receiving direction. I already really liked [child] but this caused me to like [child] even more.

This harkens to themes in research involving Indigenous heritage families, that children's participation in family ventures gave children a sense of 'dignity and respect' (TEDx Santa Cruz, 2015) – the dignity and respect of parents recognizing and bolstering children's beliefs in their own value, and children being allowed to act on that to make real contributions. In this context, 'responsibility' takes on a positive light as children take it on voluntarily - it is not a demand, and not a drain on energy and time, but a benefit: a way to embody a sense of belonging and worth, and possibly to increase them both.

The warmth in the above quote and others describing interacting together with children is notable. Increased positive attributions may have allowed more parental warmth, which in turn also seemed to grow from these various positive interactions in a positive feedback loop.

**"This is it!"** There may also be a sense of mindfulness involved; another parent described having more presence and awareness that allowed them to enjoy the moment more as they interacted with their children:

You find yourself kind of walking the walk with them and enjoying the path versus feeling like - one more task on a list of things you're not going to do today, right?... it's been really freeing to remember that this is – this is it! This is like their childhood; this is our parenting experience right now so let's immerse ourselves in it. Well, we already are, but let's be aware of it and actually start enjoying it again.

**Pride/Confidence.** Themes emerged of both parent and child gaining confidence and taking pride in what they did. This is consistent with parents' being able to see children as more capable and motivated, and to scaffold interactions so the child can get better at what they were attempting to do. Parents described children being proud of actually being of use: *"[Child] takes pride in being able to help... [child] feels a greater sense of pride in [child]'s abilities and has learned new skills."* This parent, who elsewhere says the child thrives from helping, here gives a picture of children having pride in taking agency to make real contributions:

[Child] is just blossoming. [Child] KNOWS [child] can help. [Child] KNOWS that what [child] does is necessary, good, and valuable without even being told. [Emphasis is parent's.] We give them the freedom to be a part of it to the level they want to, and they really walk away feeling proud.

Confidence increased in both directions: *“I feel slightly more confident in my knowledge of this one aspect of parenting,”* and for a parent who already collaborated with their toddler to do household work before RHT, *“I recognized that letting [child] do chores instead of directing [child] to go play is acceptable and doesn’t make me a bad parent.”* Note the message that this foreign-born parent got regarding ‘acceptable’ parenting – that parents’ role is to send children off to play by themselves and not “indulge” their desire to help with chores (a word this parent used elsewhere). This parent appreciated the training as a validation of what they were already doing, though guiltily before RHT, so that they could increase and improve upon those practices.

**Stress.** Many quotes above describe situations in which parents had more positive emotion, were having fun with children, interacted with patience, and felt they were contributing to their child’s positive development (i.e., high PSE). While some parents did not mention stress explicitly, in the scenarios they depicted, parents often seem to have a greater sense of ease. Most parents who did explicitly mention stress reported having less stress — in the context of doing chores with toddlers and occasionally in general, for many different reasons. While 2 parents reported increased stress in particular situations or because of having *“one more thing to think about”* while parenting, 1 of those parents reported reduced overall stress, suggesting that though for at least some parents stress increased, overall reduced stress may have been the most common for this group of parents. Reduced stress in turn likely enhanced and stemmed from other benefits indicated above (e.g., Fang et al., 2022).

**Relax and Spend Time.** Many parents seemed better able to simply relax and enjoy time with their children, thereby reducing stress, as can be seen in many of the quotes already discussed. Parents portray time doing chores as less burdensome, more engaging, and more interesting for both parents and toddlers – e.g., a chance for both to learn, and simply as time to spend with their toddler in otherwise busy lives.

**Decreased stress of time urgency** was a theme from parent narratives: *“I am spending more time doing chores while [child] is awake, which allows me to do more work for my job while [child] is sleeping,”* and *“before, I’m trying to do a lot of things during times when [child]’s busy or when someone else is watching [child], instead of have an opportunity to just hang out and relax.”*

**Reframing what chores should be.** Parents seemed to reduce stress by adopting new perspectives on what should get done during chores, and reframing what housework means – housework for parents seemed to become more of a teaching opportunity, an opportunity to spend time with and get to know children, and/or enhance their development. One parent reported experiencing *“not as much stress with chores now: it’s exciting to see what [child] will take to and how I can teach [child].”* In that light, accomplishing every task as efficiently as possible is no longer the main goal. Expectations regarding how much should be accomplished normalized for this parent: *“I have gotten too serious, and this has started to help me lighten up, enjoy, and let go. I am releasing expectations and becoming more realistic about to-do lists.”*

The following parent describes a shift from a fear-laden and negatively focused mindset to one of recognizing and capitalizing on the opportunities of everyday work:

So, I think that the training has taught me to think more of it as not so much as ‘There’s so many things that could go wrong with this,’ but more so of ‘how can I encourage [child] to do it in a way where it’s safe for [child], but [child]’s also helping?’.... I’d say that the training has helped me encourage [child] more, as a positive and beneficial thing, as opposed to: ‘you’re just making this process longer and it’s very dangerous for you.’ It has been really helpful to have a different perspective and to try to just generally figure out ways in which to get [child] involved.

The change in this parent’s mindset may be a mechanism for reduced stress and suggests a shift toward higher quality parent-child interactions as well.

Another parent characterized changes in how they viewed household work as ‘transformations’ which reduced the stress of getting the work done and enabled a sense of joy:

A lot of the transformations have been with me too, and not just with my child, in terms of how I reframe and think about housework. And that’s been what I think as a working [parent], as a [parent] of color, that’s been one of the biggest challenges..., to figure out how to make it less stressful, you know, how to get it all done and still do the things that bring me joy.

Altogether, the varied results regarding translating values to practice, higher quality parent/child interactions, and reduced stress are highly intertwined but quite unique for each parent. Parents’ narratives were consistent with proposed mechanisms of increasing parental positive attributions of toddlers’ actions. As parents’ understanding of toddlers’ motivations and abilities became more accurate, this seemed to have allowed more sensitive and responsive parenting in the form of more appropriate and positive parent responses.

## 7. Discussion

Evidence suggests that the socialization of helping was malleable in this sample of highly educated parents, and that their children experienced different socialization practices regarding helping at home after they participated in Raising Helpful Toddlers (RHT), a novel training for parents of children aged 12 to 48 months. Parents reported changing beliefs and practices in alignment with RHT and described interacting with toddlers more collaboratively more often, further suggesting that RHT may have promoted children’s early helping, a possibility that future work should test directly with a more educationally diverse sample. Parents reported changed dynamics of parent-child interactions and provided examples of toddlers experiencing more agency in enacting their desires to help, and more frequent and more collaborative interactions with parents. Parents described toddlers having more fun, taking pride in helping and learning, and gaining confidence, suggesting there may have been significant benefits for some children. While promising, future work measuring baseline levels and child behavior is needed to confirm these findings.

### 7.1. An array of reported benefits

Parents reported many specific benefits that were not predicted. An array of benefits would be expected if parents experienced positive changes in their attributions of toddlers and their everyday actions, and if they responded more appropriately, and felt increased agency to support their positive development. This result is also consistent with achieving a goal of RHT delivering core concepts reliably and with flexibility according to differing family situations and needs.

Evidence suggests that for the parents in the study, there were higher quality parent-child interactions after parents took RHT. Many parents described toddlers taking more agency to help, and some explained changes in terms of toddlers having more fun, taking pride in helping and learning, and gaining confidence. Parents often indicated overall lower stress and more perceived quality time for supporting toddler’s development. These findings are consistent with the design goal that any increase in parent stress be temporary and small compared to overall benefits.

While these data are suggestive, they should be confirmed in future studies, which should include more parents with lower amounts of Western schooling. The higher educational attainment of the sample calls into question whether benefits generalize to parents from a diversity of educational backgrounds. Nonetheless, preliminary evidence with these highly educated parents is consistent with the hypothesis that using RHT strategies benefited children in at least some of the many ways that helping, collaborating, active learning, and social belonging are known to benefit children’s development.

Evidence from this pilot trial supported the hypothesis that parents wanted children to help. Most parents changed practices when they learned that toddlers are generally willing and able to help and when they learned strategies for supporting toddlers' helping. While the sample was on the small side for quantitative analyses, an increase in parenting self-efficacy (PSE) with moderate to large effect size corroborated parent qualitative reports and indicated that parents may have experienced benefits that extended beyond the context of doing household work.

### 7.2. Evidence for changes in parenting: PSE, sensitivity, responsivity, and stress

Studies have shown direct effects of PSE on parent depression, and effects on stress, parenting behaviors, and child outcomes (Crnic & Ross, 2017; Giallo et al., 2014; Teti & Gelfand, 1991; Weaver et al., 2008), suggesting that future studies of RHT include these measures. Future work should also include measures of child behavior and well-being as PSE has been related to measures such as children's healthier attachment, less problematic behavior and emotions, and higher parent/child interaction quality including parental responsivity and sensitivity (Bugental & Cortez, 1988; Coleman & Karraker, 1998; Donovan et al., 1990; Jones & Prinz, 2005; Rominov et al., 2016; Williams et al., 1987; Wittkowski et al., 2017).

Parent reports suggest some may have increased parental sensitivity: understanding child cues, and appropriately responding to scaffold children's interests (Newton et al., 2014). When they saw toddlers' actions as bids to help, albeit unskilled, many parents supported their agency to participate, and guided their unskilled attempts. The implications of increasing parents' positive attributions of toddlers' actions are significant, as reducing negative attributions and increasing positive attributions is associated with lower risk for child maltreatment (Beckerman et al., 2017; Black et al., 2001; Stern & Azar, 1998; Whiteman et al., 1987).

Following RHT, many parents described guiding children's helping attempts more, e.g., showing them how to hold a dustpan, put clothes in a drawer, or push the button for the coffee maker. Reports of missing/misinterpreting toddlers' interest in helping before RHT suggest that after RHT, parents had a better sense of toddlers' intentions and interests, as further exemplified by scenarios in which parents averted conflict, included toddlers, and did so often to the delight or satisfaction of toddlers and parents. Many parents also reported that their child helped around the house more and with more initiative. Higher PSE may also have resulted from parents better encouraging a sense of togetherness and belonging that was beneficial for both children and parents post-RHT. Taken together, these results are consistent with previous work indicating that parental sensitivity was bi-directionally associated with instrumental helping in laboratory settings (Hammond & Carpendale, 2015; Newton et al., 2014; Newton et al., 2016). Future studies can use direct observations to explore further whether parents increase sensitivity and responsivity after RHT, and more directly measure whether toddlers help more and take more initiative to help.

While reports of increased stress did exist in the sample, the far more commonly reported reduction of stress aligns with strong evidence in the literature that higher PSE is associated with less parent stress and depression (Bugental et al., 1993; Crnic & Ross, 2017). Parents in this study described changes that likely reduced stress for them: having more fun and positive interactions, reframing chores into meaningful activities, and integrating important parenting goals, i.e., raising a child to be helpful, with accomplishing everyday household work. Next steps are to test the intervention against an active control intervention to more clearly establish that there are unique training effects of RHT and to more thoroughly test whether benefits extend to other contexts of parenting beyond doing household work.

### 7.3. Limitations and future work

Potential demand characteristics are inherent in RHT, as in many parent trainings, and may have been amplified in this study with the program developer conducting the follow up interviews, despite efforts to encourage free sharing of actual experiences. In RHT, the goals and the rationale of the training are clearly presented, and parents may have altered what they said accordingly in interviews or answers in questionnaires. Also, toddlerhood tends to be a challenging time for parents; it may be that parents benefitted and increased PSE simply from talking with an experienced educator about parenting challenges and successes.

Evidence from this study suggests, however, that benefits came specifically from RHT content and implementation. The PSE questionnaire is not clearly linked to training goals and thus is perhaps less susceptible to demand. More importantly, the content of parent comments in response to broad questions suggested RHT-specific effects, as did the voluntary nature of responses to open-ended questions, and the array of benefits reported, as well as reported benefits that were not predicted, e.g., reduced stress. Future work can confirm whether RHT-specific effects are varied and substantial and expand on them through a randomized controlled trial in which observers/experimenters are unaware of hypotheses and condition.

In future work, a shorter, more straightforward assessment protocol should be developed so that effects can be tested with a larger sample size to confirm findings of increased PSE with greater power, and a sample that includes parents less likely to complete an extensive research protocol such as that used here. A common challenge of small pilot studies with convenience samples was faced here also: more highly educated parents sought out the opportunity to participate. Recruiting a more diverse sample is especially important given that this sample was also more likely to have experience with research, and therefore may have been more motivated to complete a longer research protocol, and more practiced at understanding a more intricate protocol. RHT was created to be appropriate for low literacy samples: the content is provided verbally and through videos, and language in slides is at a 9th grade reading level. Yet parents with less education or less time may find the extensive assessment protocol in this study challenging or undesirable. With a larger study, we intend to investigate these factors, ensure inclusive access to the training, and utilize technology to ease participation in the research protocol (e.g., through streamlined cell phone texting-based Ecological Momentary Assessment vs. daily logs). It may also be that parents highly educated in Western schooling are more likely to use UWEC parenting and benefit from RHT strategies, as previous work suggested that experience with Western education might be associated with UWEC parenting (Coppens et al., 2016; Rogoff et al., 1993; Rogoff et al., 2005).

Future work beyond this initial pilot study should also ensure a diversity of backgrounds of coders, as primary coders here both came from an UWEC upbringing, as did the researchers. Moving forward it is important for some coders/researchers to have experience growing up with more collaborative constellations of practices so that more, relevant nuances in parent and family experiences may be detected to better understand the range of parent experiences with RHT and how it may be adapted or improved. Relatedly, a fuller family systems approach would be preferred in considering the development of helping but is beyond the scope of this small pilot study that focuses on a child within the age range and a primary caregiver. More appropriate as units of analyses may be families or helping events, to examine sibling effects, better characterize enacting family goals, and to better consider voluntariness and other qualities of helping. For example, fluid, ensemble collaborative interactions that have been characterized in some Indigenous-heritage families (Mejia-Arauz et al., 2018) might be a topic for future family education. Further, family structure can be explored as siblings likely influence how toddlers learn and experience helping as well (Hughes et al., 2018).

#### 7.4. A Future RHT: Beyond Fundamentals

It should be noted that not all aspects of parenting described in the literature as related to children's helping in Indigenous heritage families was incorporated into RHT. The focus here is on practices and elements thought to be the most fundamental, yet those elements and others not included should be explored further. While scaffolding in a Vygotskian sense is mentioned here, it is important to note that pushing children further in their zone of proximal development was not a characteristic of parent-child interactions as observed in ethnographic work (de Haan, 1999; Gaskins, 1999; Mezzenzana, 2020; Rogoff, 2003). A more subtle form of guidance was described that prioritized getting the work done (e.g., Paradise et al., 2014). While in RHT, parents are encouraged to focus on the goal of getting work done and to direct children only when needed to do that, it was not expected that all parents would necessarily be able to adopt this form of guidance fully. That ethnographic literature also points out that Indigenous heritage parents of the Americas did not tend to create experiences to fit what children want to do, yet RHT suggested parents change how they did their work in reasonable ways to accommodate children – the priority of RHT was to update or move away from a dominant Euro-heritage model that negates children's abilities, motivations, and agency to help, while maintaining a focus on how much children can learn and develop positively in the process. Future iterations of RHT may explore more advanced elements of family collaboration.

It was clear from results that some parents in this study were not aware of their children's abilities at first, yet learned more about them through RHT, suggesting that a focus on fundamentals may have been appropriate, while a more advanced, future version of RHT may be able to also help parents work on the more subtle guidance described in Indigenous and Indigenous heritage families that depends upon parents' inclusion of children based upon children's competencies (de Haan, 1999; Gaskins, 1999; Rogoff, 2003). Future work can explore whether/how that, and other parenting practices not taken up fully in this preliminary work may translate across cultures and provide benefits to children and families, such as cultivating an environment in which children have more open, broad attention to what is going on around them and learn well from observing and imitating independently (Gaskins, 2013; Mezzenzana, 2020; Rogoff, 2014; Lancy). Many parents spoke of children being more aware of household activities after they were able to participate in them, suggesting these areas of inquiry hold promise. Of course, not all practices related to children's extensive voluntary helping in Indigenous heritage families will fit the many different priorities, demands and contexts of families across cultures. A framing of exploring commonalities of benefit is suggested.

#### 7.5. Implications

Implications of this work are potentially far-reaching if future larger scale RCTs of RHT extend these positive results. If this preliminary evidence generalizes beyond the sample, parents may benefit from enhancement of currently understood best practices for parenting toddlers, which often emphasize child-directed play with toys. Many parents described diverse benefits from recognizing the value of allowing children's agency within a framework of acting toward important group goals. There were indications that children gained confidence in their abilities and experienced the fulfillment of impacting the group positively, from being allowed the dignity of actual participation toward family goals as observed in Indigenous heritage families (Gaskins, 2020; Rogoff, 2003). In these data, this kind of participation seemed to benefit both parents who described this time as less stressful, and children who were described to react positively in several ways, including gaining more mastery of tasks and use of related skills, as described in work cited above and many ethnographic works involving Indigenous heritage families. Updating best practices in these ways to pass on to parents may also make best practices culturally more accessible and appropriate for

families of varied national and ethnic backgrounds.

Families immigrating to the U.S. from a minoritized global majority are often subject to racism and mistrust within a culture that emphasizes UWEC practices. This may be especially true for Indigenous families, as the intersectionality of oppressed identities exacerbates those adversities (Paradies, 2016; also, regarding Indigenous immigrants from the Americas in particular: Castellanos, 2017; Chón, 2019, 2022; Evans-Campbell, 2008; Linthroth, 2022; Obolor, 2012; Rodriguez & Menjivar, 2015). Some information from RHT may help counter societal pressure to give up beneficial collaborative practices and conform to UWEC practices. Future work can investigate whether RHT may influence UWEC parents to also counter such societal pressure and better respect and support families with more collaborative family ways, as well as to adopt some of those ways themselves. Importantly, there may be opportunities for RHT to be used to bolster cultural revitalization efforts in Indigenous and Indigenous-heritage communities, migrant and not, especially given a history in North America of Indigenous family disruption via forced removal of children to boarding schools, forced relocation of communities, and direct violence. That aim is core to future RHT work.

#### 8. Conclusion

Long ago scholars pointed out with alarm what they saw as a big problem: that children's prosocial development is limited in middle class, Euro-heritage culture (Minturn & Lambert, 1964; Whiting, 1978; Whiting & Whiting, 1973, 1975). Some suggested changes in education and home environments to address the problem. Yet today, even specifically in the study of the socialization of prosocial behavior, these cultural differences and the factors suggested to cause them are rarely considered in academic research of 'universal' developmental processes (see Alcalá et al., 2018; Arnett, 2008; Henrich et al., 2010; Nielsen et al., 2017). By fully integrating and actively building upon what scholars have known for decades, academia can expand upon and improve the accuracy of its knowledge base and inform beneficial socialization of children's helping from their early years across cultures. Then true healing may be more possible, and children across cultures may increasingly act with agency to benefit others as they grow.

#### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Luc Fairchild:** Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Larissa G. Duncan:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision, Software.

#### Conflict of interest

We have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

#### Data availability

The authors do not have participant permission to share data.

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