

Center for Health & Safety Culture

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2021 Montana Parent Survey Key Findings Report

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Introduction

Healthy mental, emotional, and behavioral development is important for young people to lead meaningful, productive, and engaged lives. There are many strategies that can promote and strengthen healthy mental, emotional, and behavioral development. One powerful strategy is to grow social and emotional skills.¹

Individuals can learn social and emotional skills at any age. Children can learn social and emotional skills from their parents and caregivers. Parents and those in a parenting role can grow social and emotional skills through intentional practice and reflection. ParentingMontana.org, an online resource for parents and those in a parenting role, includes numerous “tools” addressing common parenting issues (e.g., establishing routines, getting homework done, building confidence) that use a five-step process designed to grow the social and emotional skills of parents and children.

The purpose of this survey was to continue to explore the relationship between social and emotional skills and child wellbeing and identify potential topics for resources to support parent wellbeing. Social and emotional skills include understanding and managing oneself, relating to others, and making responsible choices based on self and others. This survey explored the use of questions specifically designed to assess social and emotional skills in the context of parenting. The skills were grouped into five competencies:²

- Parenting Self-Awareness
- Parenting Self-Management
- Parenting Social Awareness
- Parenting Relationship/Social Skills
- Parenting Responsible Decision Making

The survey asked parents a series of questions to assess their parenting social and emotional skills. It also included questions about social connectedness, child flourishing,³ and family resilience.⁴

The survey also asked parents to list three things that they need to take care of themselves as a parent and to rank the importance of 10 areas potentially impacting their wellbeing as a parent.

Survey Methodology

The survey used an internet convenience sample of adults living in Montana recruited online by Qualtrics between October 2 and October 26, 2021, who indicated they had a child age 18 or younger. The final sample included 155 respondents: 51.6% were female; ages ranged from 18 to 58 years (mean 36.1 years, standard deviation 7.3 years); 8.4% were Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino; 90% were white; 7.7% were American Indian or Alaska Native; and most had a high school degree or more

¹ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2019). *Fostering Healthy Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Development in Children and Youth: A National Agenda*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25201>

² See the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (www.casel.org).

³ See the National Survey of Children's Health (2018) at <https://www.childhealthdata.org/learn-about-the-nsch/NSCH>.

⁴ Bethell, C. D., Gombojav, N., & Whitaker, R. C. (2019). Family Resilience and Connection Promote Flourishing Among US Children, Even Amid Adversity. *Health Affairs (Project Hope)*, 38(5), 729–737.

education (24.5% high school only, 31.6% some college, 9.0% Associate's degree, 21.3% Bachelor's degree, and 9.7% post-graduate degree).

All the respondents had one or more children: 43.9% had a child age birth to 5, 61.3% had a child age 6 to 11, and 49.0% had a child age 12 to 18.

Several items were used to assess each of the five parenting social and emotional competencies. These items showed good internal reliability (as assessed by Cronbach's alpha which ranged from .66 to .80). Social connectedness was assessed using three questions exploring each of six relationships: family members living outside the home, friends, neighbors, staff at the child school or child care, parents of children at the child's school or child care, and people at a faith community. The internal reliability of these items was strong (Cronbach's alpha ranged from .73 to .92).

Because the respondents were recruited online and not randomly selected, these results cannot be generalized to all parents or adults in Montana. Nonetheless, the results do provide important insights about the beliefs of parents and the relationship between their parenting social and emotional skills and important indicators such as family resilience and child flourishing and interest in parent wellbeing topics.

Parenting Social and Emotional Competencies

Figure 1 shows the distribution of five social and emotional competencies of respondents (n= 155).

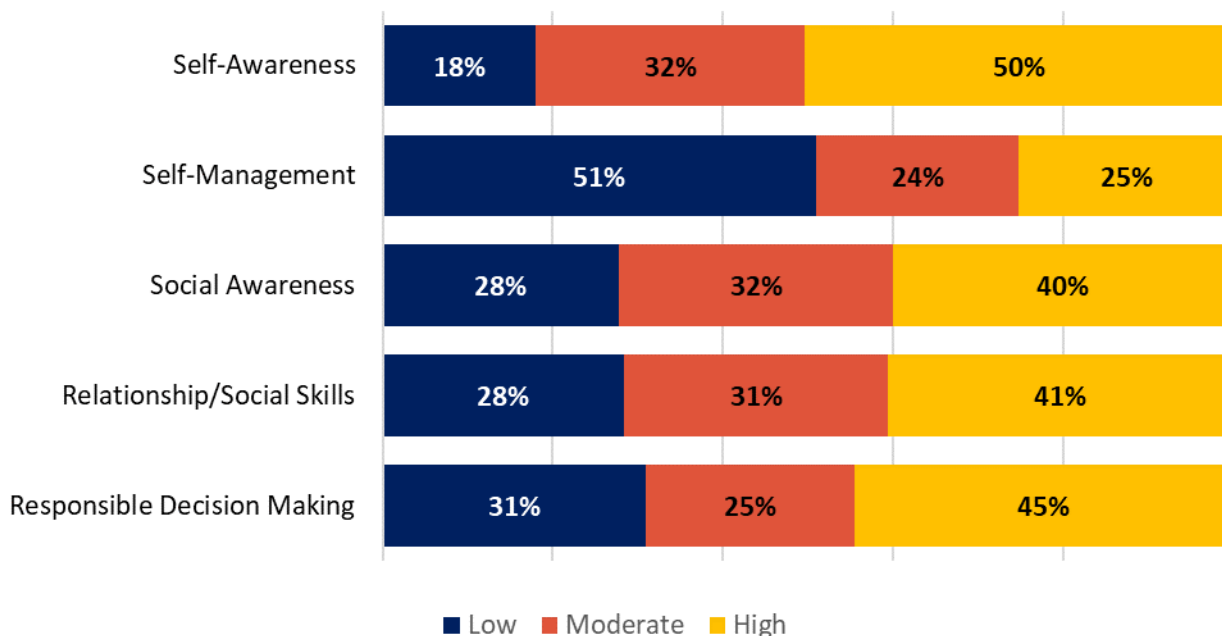


Figure 1. Parenting Social and Emotional Competencies

Observations

- Many respondents revealed strength in self-awareness, social awareness, relationship/social skills, and responsible decision making.
- However, many indicated lower levels of competency in self-management.
- Overall, many respondents have room to improve their parenting social and emotional skills.
- Parenting social and emotional competencies were correlated with family resilience ($r = .64, p < .001$). As parenting social and emotional competencies increased, family resilience increased.
- Parenting social and emotional competencies were somewhat correlated with social connectedness ($r = .30, p < .001$). As social connectedness increased, parents reported higher levels of parenting social and emotional skills.

Social Connectedness

Parenting is difficult, and social connections can provide important support for parents. Social connections with six different relationships were assessed (Figure 2).

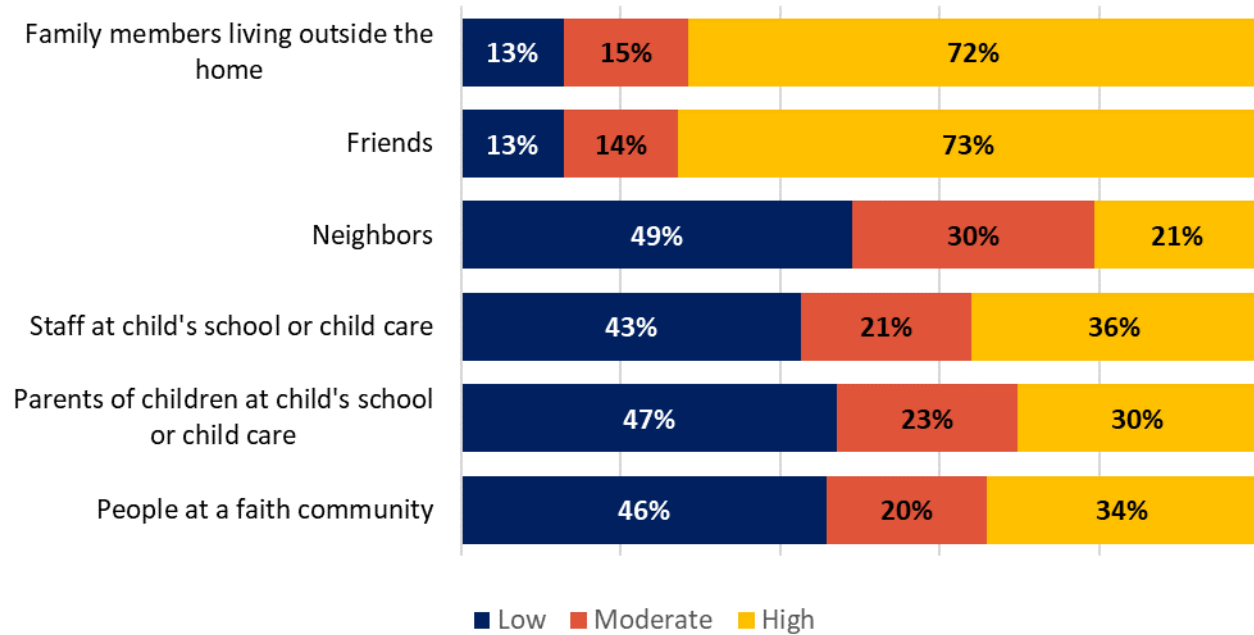


Figure 2. Levels of Social Connectedness

Observations

- Parents reported the highest levels of social connectedness with family members living outside the home and friends.
- Parents reported the lowest levels of social connectedness with neighbors.
- Social connectedness was associated with flourishing among older children (ages 6 to 18) ($r = .31, p < .001$) and family resilience ($r = .26, p < .001$). As social connectedness increased, more parents reported flourishing for older children and higher levels of family resilience.

Child Flourishing and Family Resilience

Showing interest and curiosity in learning new things, bouncing back when things don't go their way, and finishing tasks are indicators of flourishing among children. Family resilience is characterized by talking together and working together when families face problems. Flourishing among children and family resilience are supported by parents with strong parenting social and emotional skills.

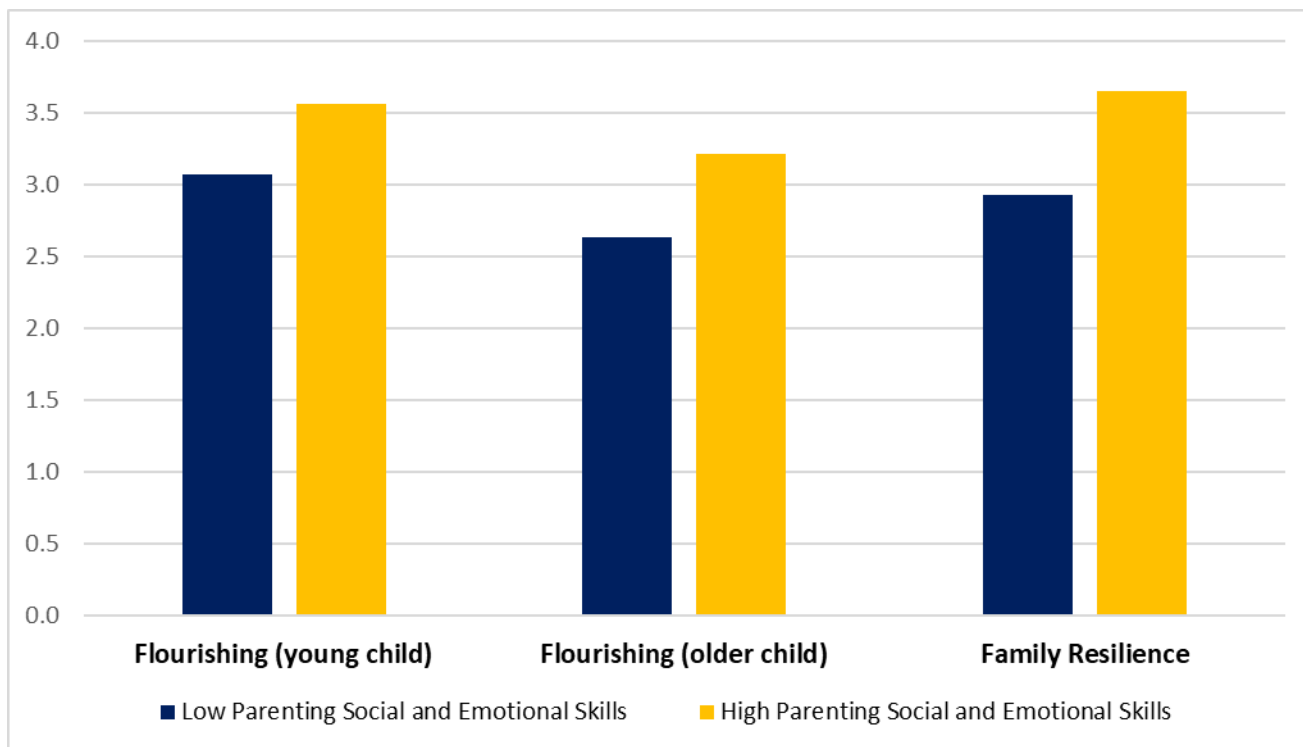


Figure 3. Child Flourishing and Family Resilience

Observations

- Parents with lower parenting social and emotional skills reported decreased flourishing among their children and less family resilience than parents with higher parenting social and emotional skills.
- Growing parenting social and emotional skills may be one way to increase flourishing among children and family resilience.

Family Resilience

Parents were asked five questions about family resilience. Figures 4 and 5 show how parents responded.

When your family faces problems, how often are you likely to...

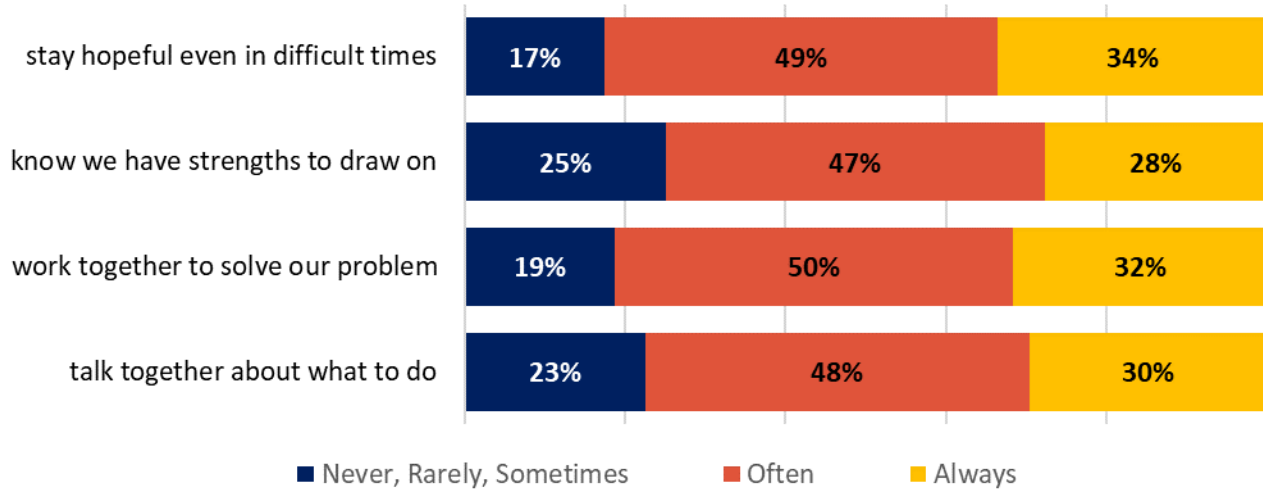


Figure 4. Family Resilience – Facing Problems

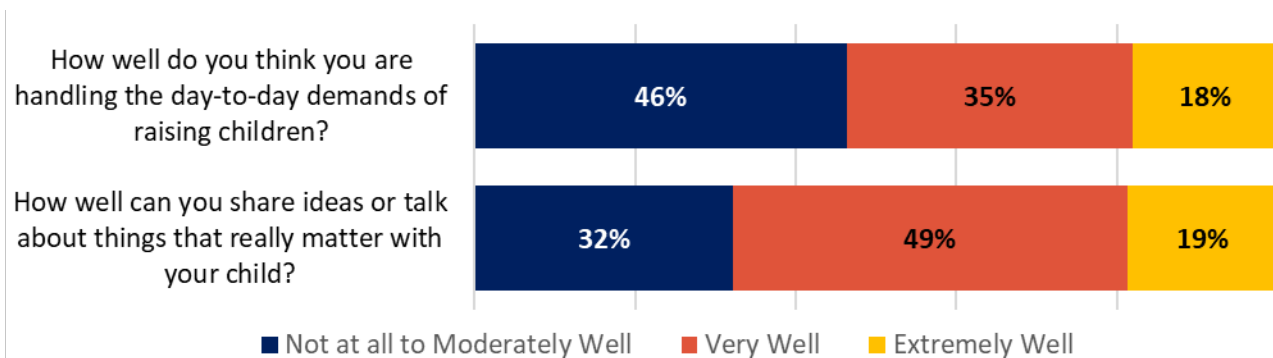


Figure 5. Family Resilience – Day-to-Day Demands and Communication

Observations

- Overall, there is room to grow family resilience. Providing parents ways to stay hopeful in difficult times, connect to their strengths, work together to solve problems, and talk together will increase family resilience.
- As parents reported stronger parenting social and emotional skills, they reported higher levels of family resilience. Growing parenting social and emotional skills like self-awareness and self-management may increase family resilience.

Parent Wellbeing

Parents were asked what three things they needed to take care of themselves as a parent. They were not given any options to choose from and could write in anything they wanted to say. Figure 6 shows the prevalence of the most common responses.

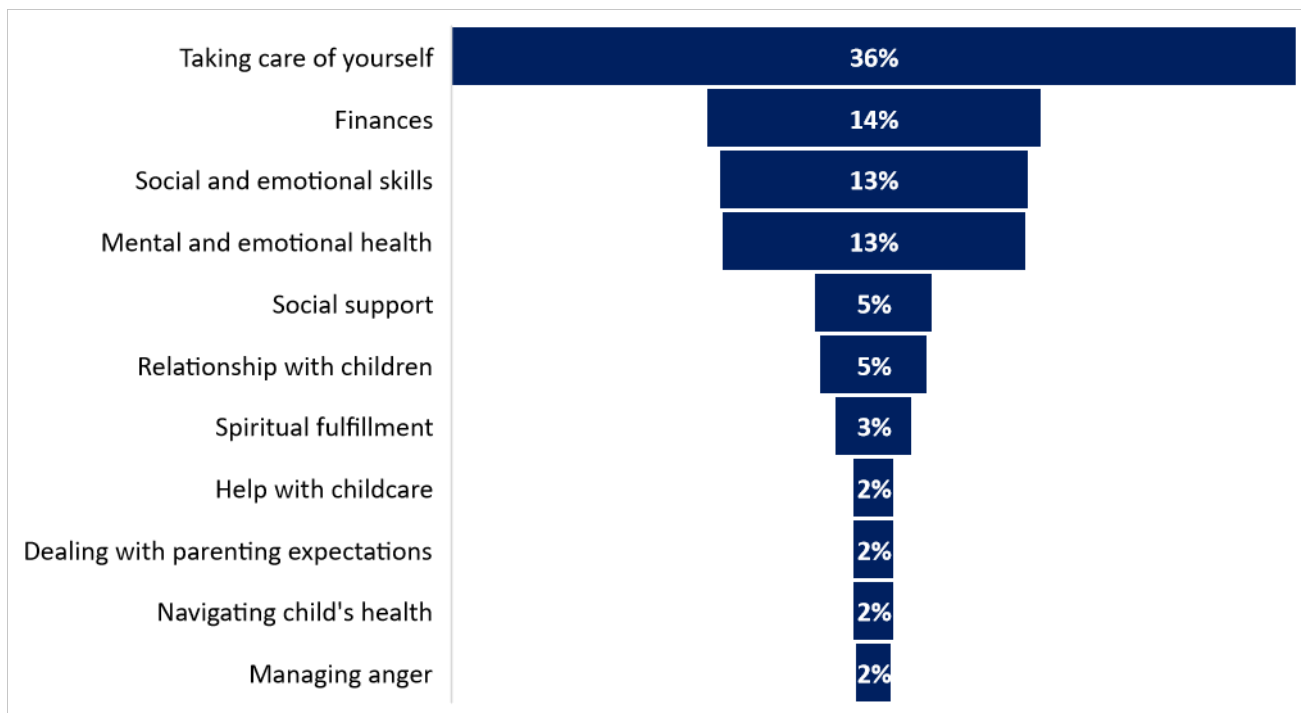


Figure 6. Parent Wellbeing

Observations

- Over one-third of parents indicated that taking care of themselves was important for their wellbeing. This included exercising, eating well, sleeping, etc.
- Many parents considered addressing finances and financial stability important for their wellbeing.
- Many parents considered addressing social and emotional skills (like patience, self-awareness, respect, love, etc.) and their mental and emotional health important for the wellbeing.

Conclusion

A survey was developed and implemented to explore the social and emotional competencies of parents, their social connectedness, levels of flourishing among their children, and family resilience. The survey also asked about what they thought they needed to take care of themselves as parents. Each of the five measures used to assess the five parenting social and emotional competencies and the six measures used to assess social connectedness showed strong internal reliability. Some important results include:

- Many respondents revealed strength in self-awareness, social awareness, relationship/social skills, and responsible decision making. However, many indicated lower levels of competency in self-management. This result was consistent with previous surveys conducted among Montana parents.
- Parents reported the highest levels of social connectedness with family members living outside the home and friends and the lowest levels of social connectedness with neighbors.
- Parents with higher social and emotional competencies reported higher levels of child flourishing than parents with lower social and emotional competencies.
- Similarly, parenting social and emotional competencies were correlated with family resilience ($r = .64, p < .001$). As parenting social and emotional competencies increased, family resilience increased.
- Social connectedness was associated with flourishing among older children (ages 6 to 18) ($r = .31, p < .001$) and family resilience ($r = .26, p < .001$). As social connectedness increased, more parents reported flourishing for older children and higher levels of family resilience.
- Over one-third of parents indicated that taking care of themselves was important for their wellbeing. This included exercising, eating well, sleeping, etc.
- About one in seven parents considered addressing finances and financial stability, addressing social and emotional skills (like patience, self-awareness, respect, love, etc.), and their mental and emotional health important for their wellbeing.

Efforts to grow the social and emotional competencies of parents may increase family resilience and support the healthy development of children. ParentingMontana.org includes tools and resources to grow the social and emotional competencies of parents. While these tools and resources address all five competencies, it may be beneficial to bolster efforts to improve self-management as this was the weakest competency among this sample of parents.

Growing social connections for parents may also bolster family resilience and support the healthy development of children. Many parents indicated that social connections with staff and other parents at their child's school were low. Schools may explore opportunities to grow social connections with parents. Low levels of social connections may also be a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Because the respondents were recruited online and not randomly selected, these results cannot be generalized to all parents or adults in Montana. Nonetheless, the results do provide important insights about the relationships between parenting social and emotional skills, social connectedness, and family resilience and child flourishing.

Conversation Guide

Engaging in constructive dialogue about these results has the potential to improve outcomes in your community by revealing new understanding and opportunities.

Getting Ready for Constructive Dialogue⁵

Otto Scharmer, in his research on organizational and community change, recognized the importance of preparing ourselves to learn from new information. He calls this “Quieting the Voices.” He has noted three voices that can inhibit us from learning and engaging in constructive dialogue: the voice of judgement, the voice of cynicism, and the voice of fear. We encourage you to intentionally reflect on how you respond to the results shared in this report and how these voices may be getting in the way of you seeing and learning new information.

We encourage you to acknowledge these voices and try to “quiet” them as you engage in dialogue about these results.

Questions to Foster Constructive Dialogue⁶

Questions to Reveal Deeper Insights

- What surprised you?
- What challenged you?
- What encouraged you?
- What has had real meaning for you from what you have seen in the data?
- What has been your major learning, insight, or discovery so far from these data?

Questions to Focus Collective Attention

- How do these results challenge our current approaches?
- What opportunities can you see that the data are revealing?

Questions to Create Forward Movement

- What is possible here?
- What will it take to create change?
- What needs our immediate attention going forward?
- What do we still need to learn about this issue?

⁵ Scharmer, C. O. (2009). *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges* (1st edition). San Francisco, Calif: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

⁶ Adapted from Brown, J., Isaacs, D., Community, W. C., Senge, P., & Wheatley, M. J. (2005). *The World Café: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter* (1 edition). San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.



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