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Mental Illness: Understanding the Impact on Families and How to Help

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Mental Illness: Understanding the Impact on Families and How to Help

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Disclosures



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“Trends and technologies may change, but from the Stone Age to the Internet age, two aspects of life remain constant: Family can be the source of great joy and sorrow, and parenthood is a challenge.”

(Sarah Rodman, *Boston Globe*, February 28, 2010, p. N1)




Talking Points

- **Rationale for a whole-of-family approach**
- **Examples from parents with mental illness**
- **Benefits of a whole-of-family approach**
- **Recommendations for moving forward**



A Whole-of-Family Approach: Families are the focus of mental health promotion, mental illness prevention, treatment & rehabilitation.





**Families can take many forms.
Children may be living with
birth parents, step-parents,
relatives, foster families,
adoptive families, or in other
“formal” or “informal”
arrangements.**

Mental Illness is Prevalent

- **Affects almost half of the Australian population during their lifetime; &**
- **20% of the population at any point in time.**
- **Only 1/3 of individuals with mental illness use health services.**

(Mental Health Council of Australia, 2010)



Children, Youth & Young Adults Live with Mental Illness

- At least 1/3 of young people (ages 12 to 25) have had an episode of mental illness.
- Peak ages of onset - late teens to early 30's.
- Estimates suggest about 23% of Australian children have a parent with a mental illness.
- Children, youth may be siblings, carers.

(MHCA, 2010; Maybery et al., 2009)



Parenthood is Prevalent

- Most Australians are or become parents
- In 2007, approximately 65% of women (ages 15 to 44) gave birth, at an average age of 30

(AU Institute of Health & Welfare, 2009)



Mental Illness and Parenthood

- The majority of men (57%) & women (68%) in the U.S. with mental illness during their lifetime are parents
- This is true across diagnostic categories, including psychotic disorders
- The average age of individuals with mental illness at birth of first child is about 22 for mothers and about 25 for fathers



Young Adults (18 to 26) are Parents

- No mental illness → 19% are parents
- Moderate or mild mental illness → 25% are parents
- Serious mental illness → 29% are parents

(US data; GAO-08-678 Young Adults with SMI, June 2008)

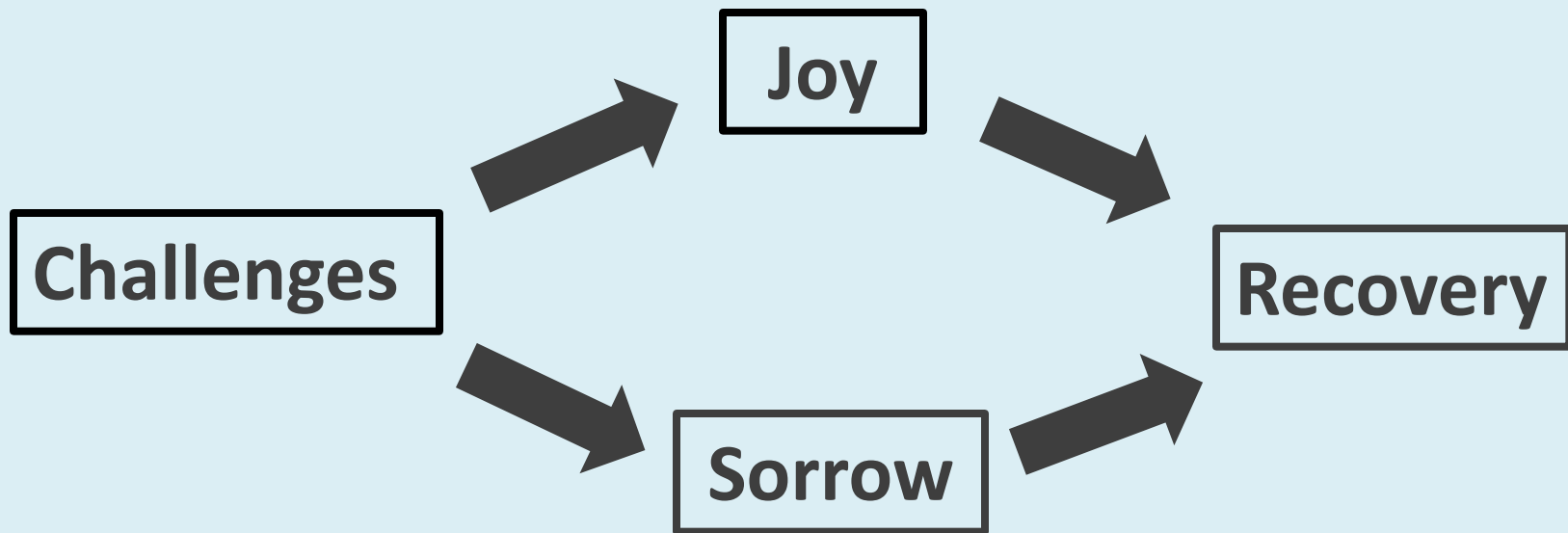


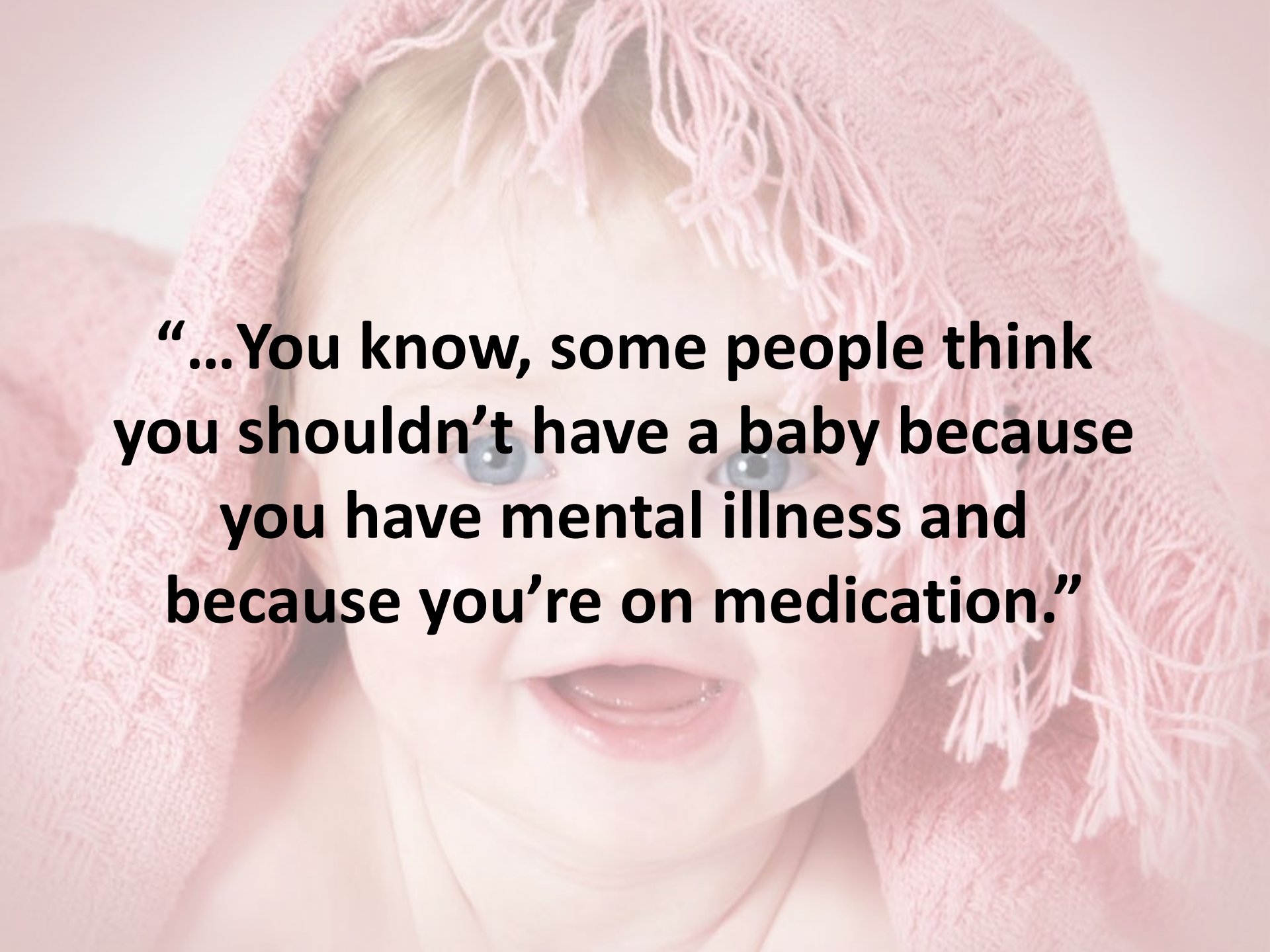
Mental Illness Affects Everyone

- **Parents of adults with mental illness often provide care to their children & grandchildren**
- **Siblings may be at risk &/or be enriched by their experiences**
- **Carers & siblings benefit from information & support**

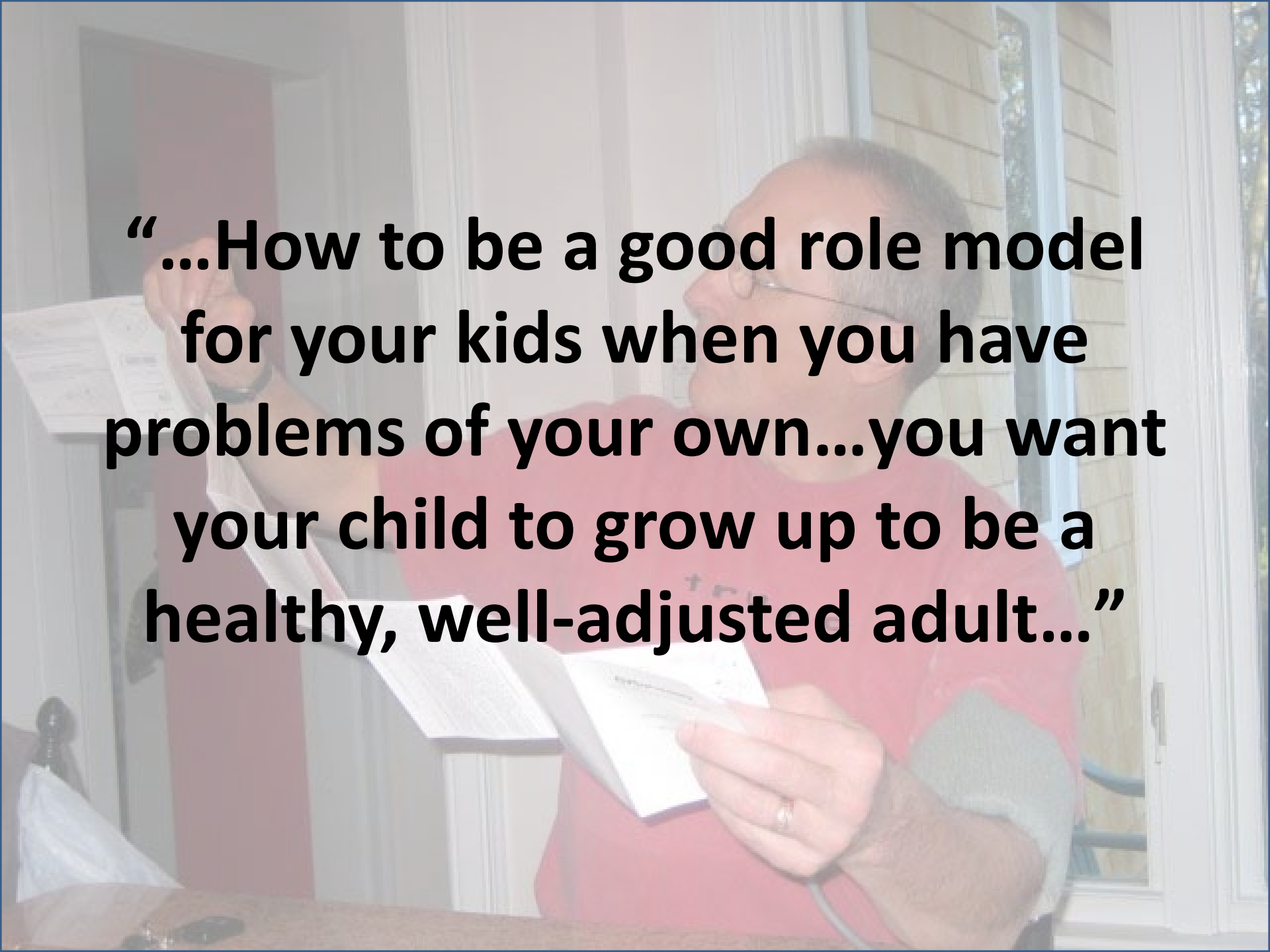


The Experiences of Parents Living with Mental Illness

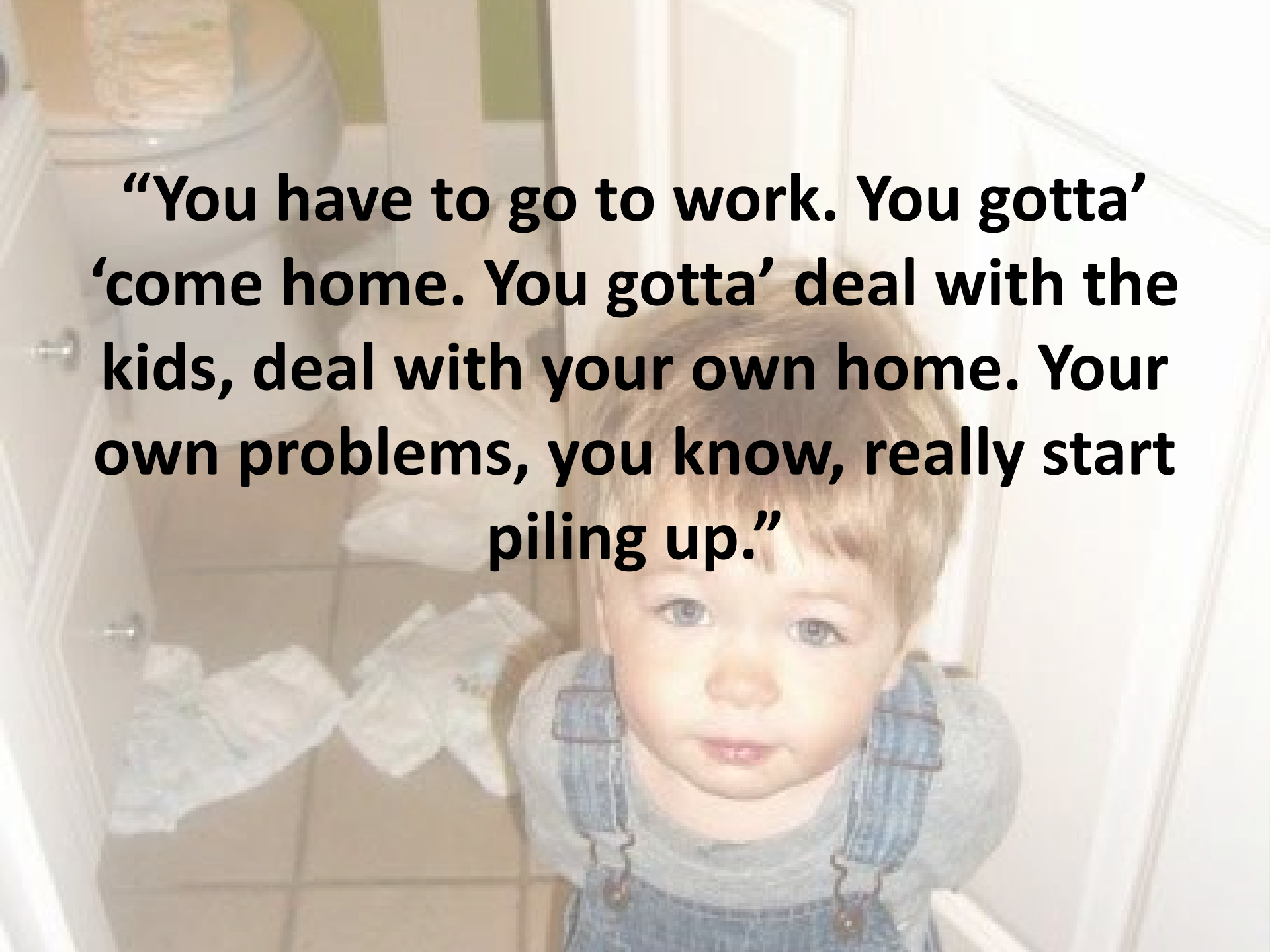




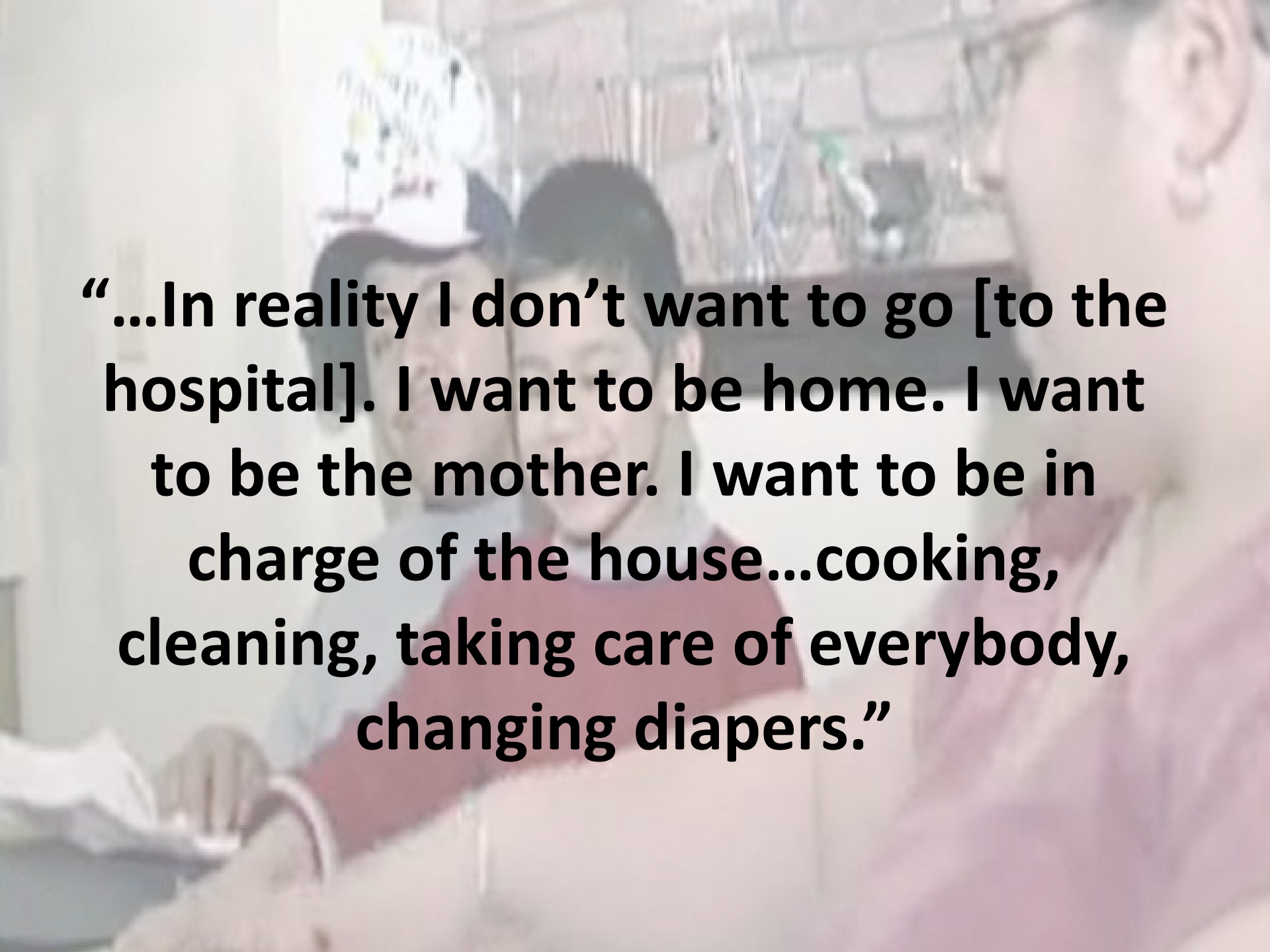
“...You know, some people think you shouldn’t have a baby because you have mental illness and because you’re on medication.”

A man with glasses and a red t-shirt is sitting at a table, looking at several papers he is holding. He appears to be in a home setting, with a window and a door visible in the background. The text is overlaid on the image in a large, bold, black font.

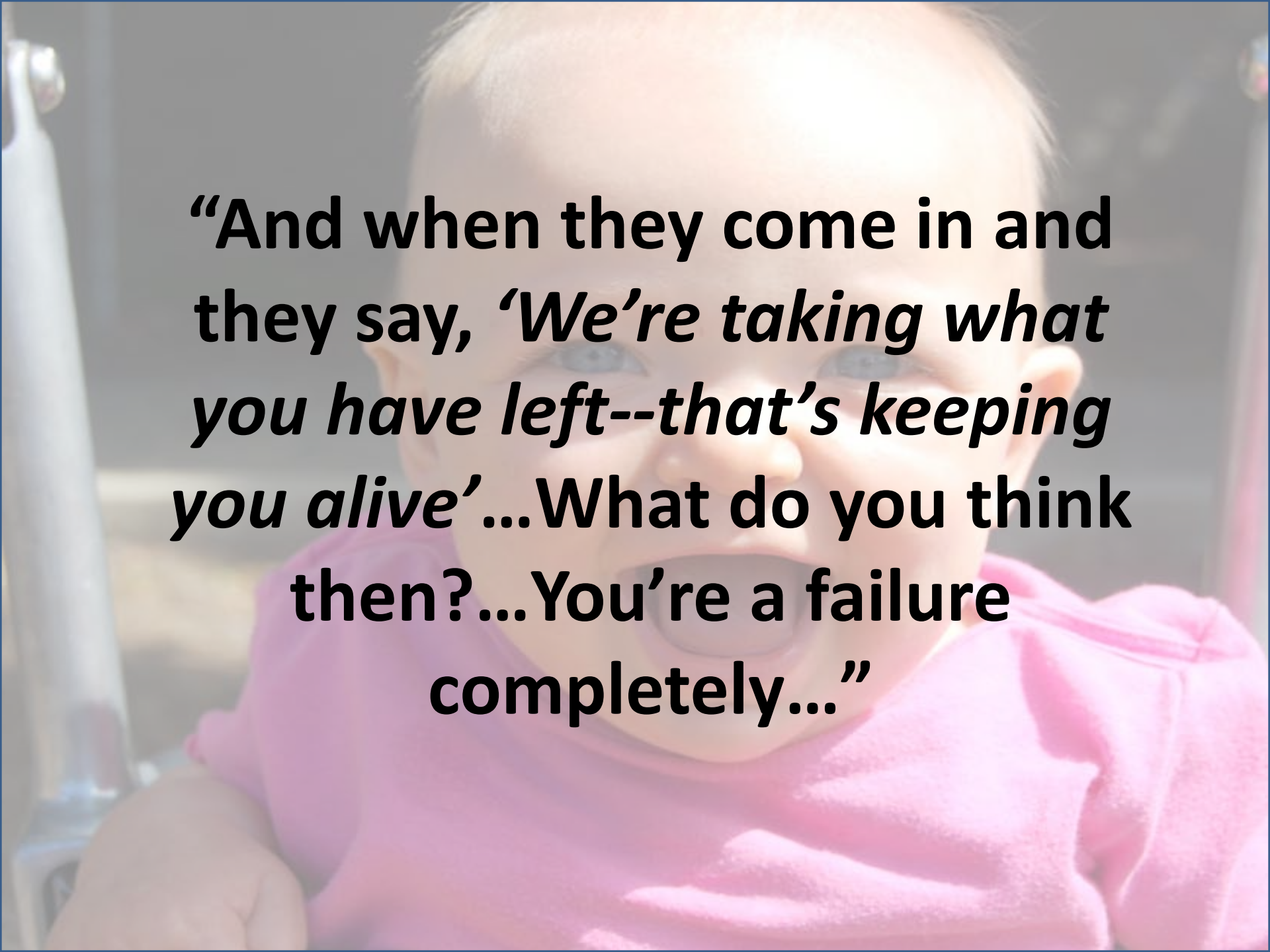
“...How to be a good role model for your kids when you have problems of your own...you want your child to grow up to be a healthy, well-adjusted adult...”

A young child with light brown hair and blue eyes, wearing a grey t-shirt and blue denim overalls, stands in a bathroom. The child is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. In the background, a white toilet is visible on the left, and the floor is covered with several pieces of white paper or napkins. The lighting is bright, and the overall scene suggests a messy or chaotic environment.

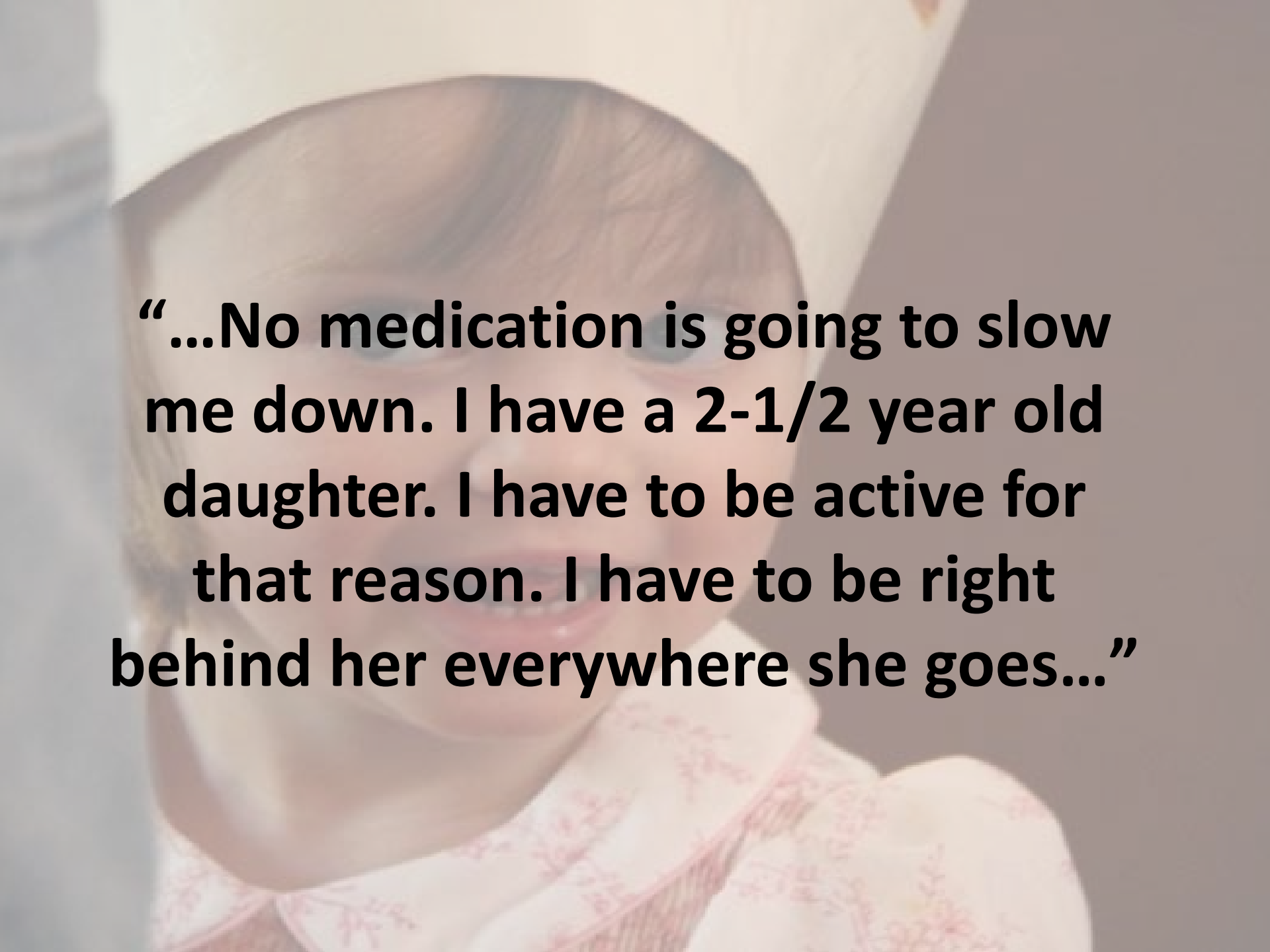
**“You have to go to work. You gotta’
‘come home. You gotta’ deal with the
kids, deal with your own home. Your
own problems, you know, really start
piling up.”**

A blurred background image showing a woman lying in a hospital bed. A medical professional, possibly a nurse, is standing by the side of the bed, looking towards the woman. The scene is dimly lit, suggesting an indoor hospital setting.

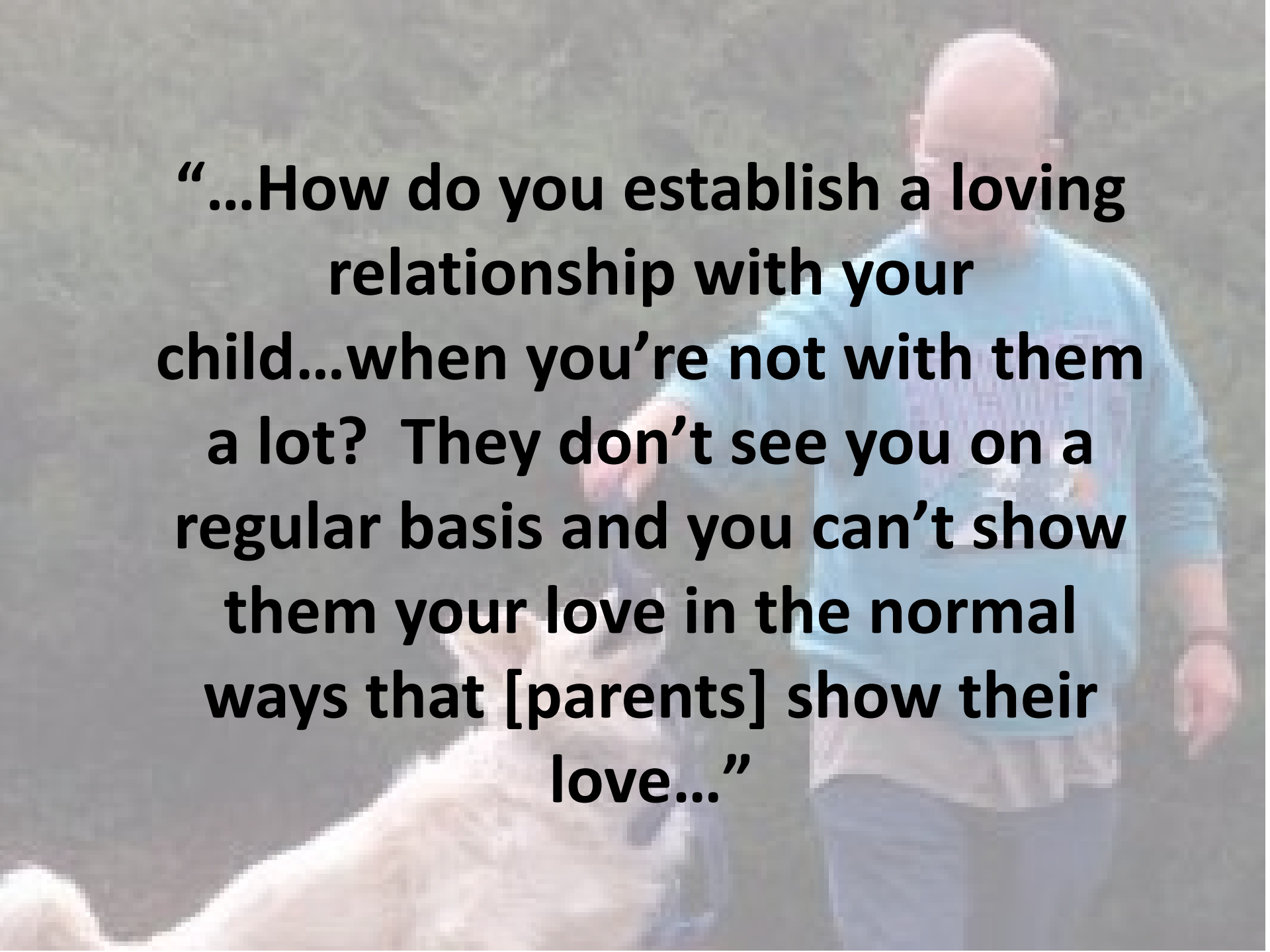
“...In reality I don’t want to go [to the hospital]. I want to be home. I want to be the mother. I want to be in charge of the house...cooking, cleaning, taking care of everybody, changing diapers.”



“And when they come in and they say, *‘We’re taking what you have left--that’s keeping you alive’*...What do you think then?...You’re a failure completely...”



“...No medication is going to slow me down. I have a 2-1/2 year old daughter. I have to be active for that reason. I have to be right behind her everywhere she goes...”

A photograph of a man in a blue long-sleeved shirt holding a baby. The man is bald and has a beard. The baby is wearing a blue onesie. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

“...How do you establish a loving relationship with your child...when you’re not with them a lot? They don’t see you on a regular basis and you can’t show them your love in the normal ways that [parents] show their love...”

The Benefits of a Whole-of-Family Approach



Shift to the family's perspective

To Promote Children's Mental Health

- Families are the key determinants of whether children with mental illness will receive services; the extent of family engagement affects children's outcomes.
- Reach children in their natural settings.
- Fit interventions into these contexts.
- Work in partnership with families & local communities.

(Kazak, Hoagwood, Weisz et al., 2010)

What Works for Older Youth

- Programs targeting employment & education, & those longer in duration are most successful.
- Mentors & case managers provide individualized support & aid.
- Child care for participants who are parents is associated with success in outcomes.

(Hadley, Mbwana, & Hair, Child Trends Fact Sheet, 2010)

Provide Family-Informed Resources & Supports to Adults

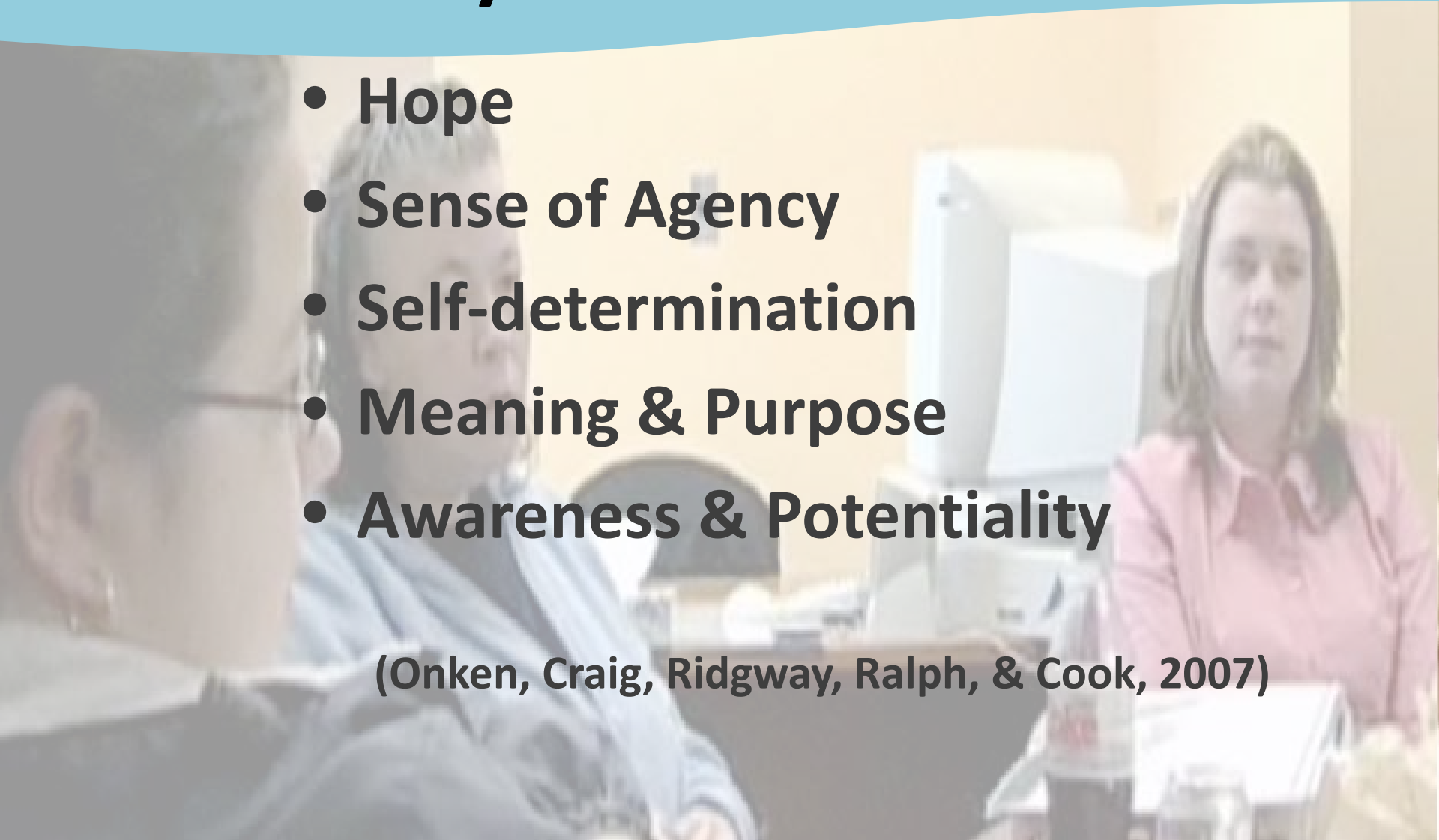
- Consider an adult's family context, reproductive issues, & goals for family life.
- Provide family-informed treatment & services, e.g., supported housing, employment, education.
- Family-focused treatment focuses on the goals of family members.

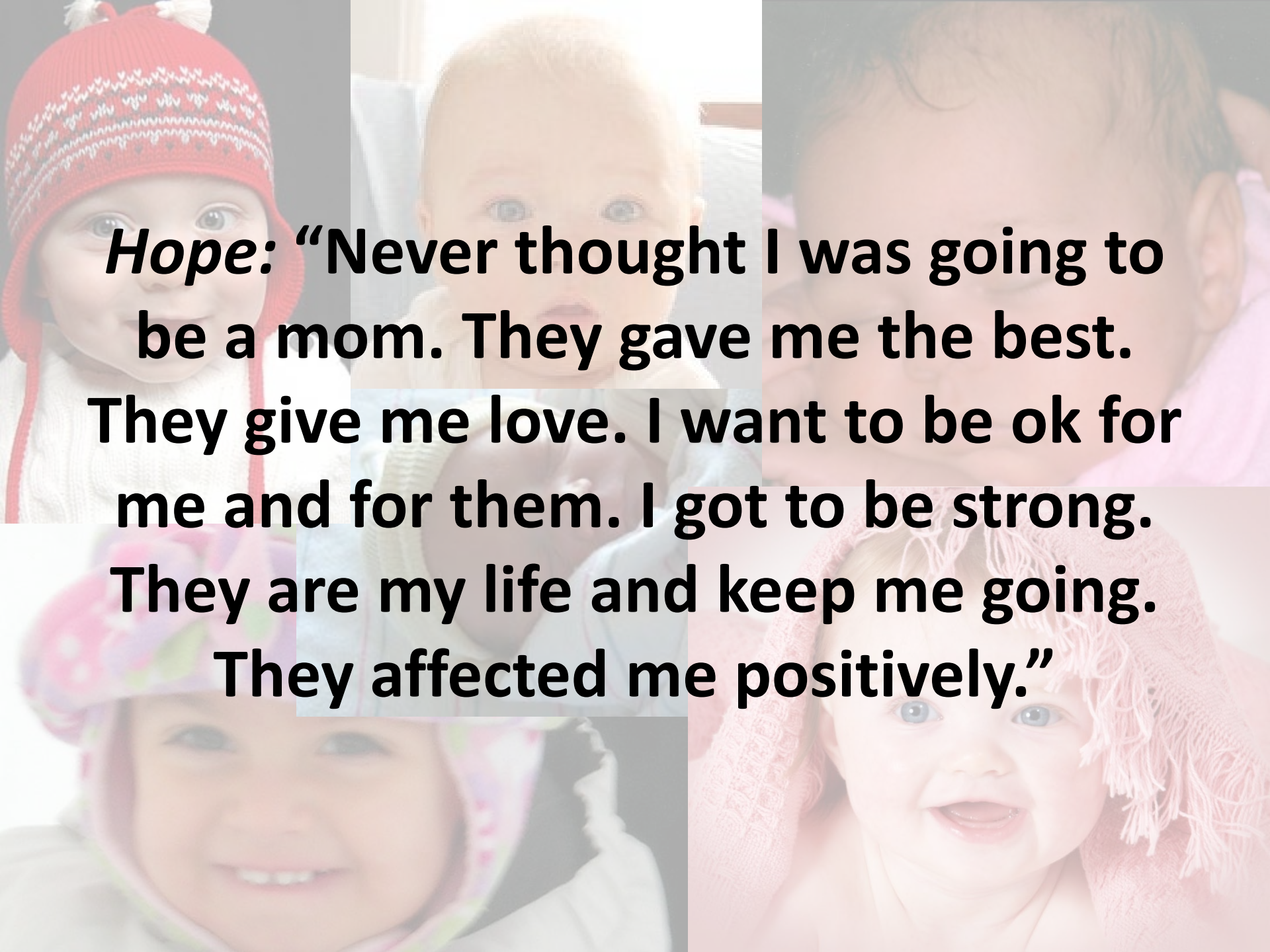
(Nicholson & Henry, 2004)

The Family Provides a Context for Recovery

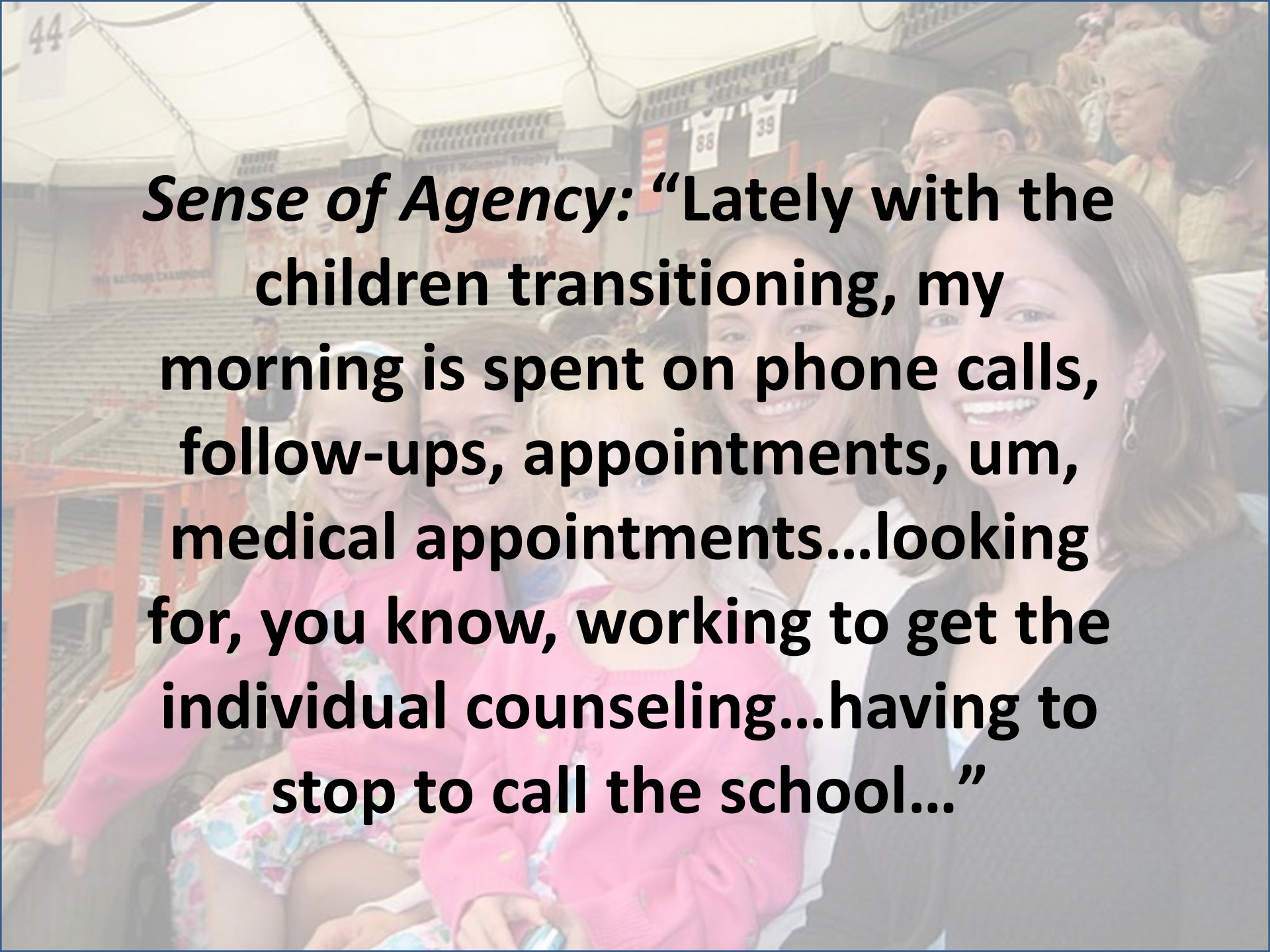
- Hope
- Sense of Agency
- Self-determination
- Meaning & Purpose
- Awareness & Potentiality

(Onken, Craig, Ridgway, Ralph, & Cook, 2007)

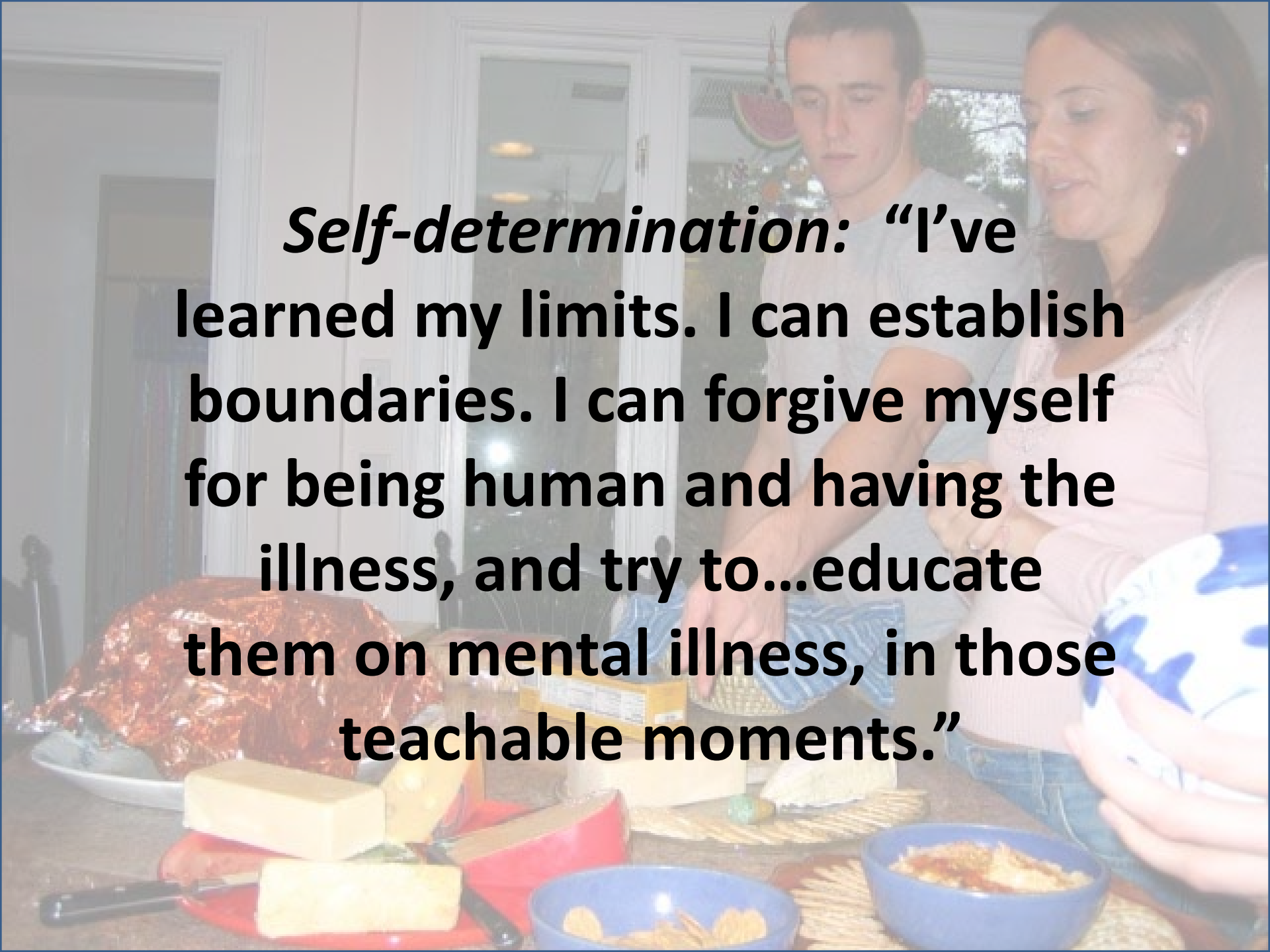




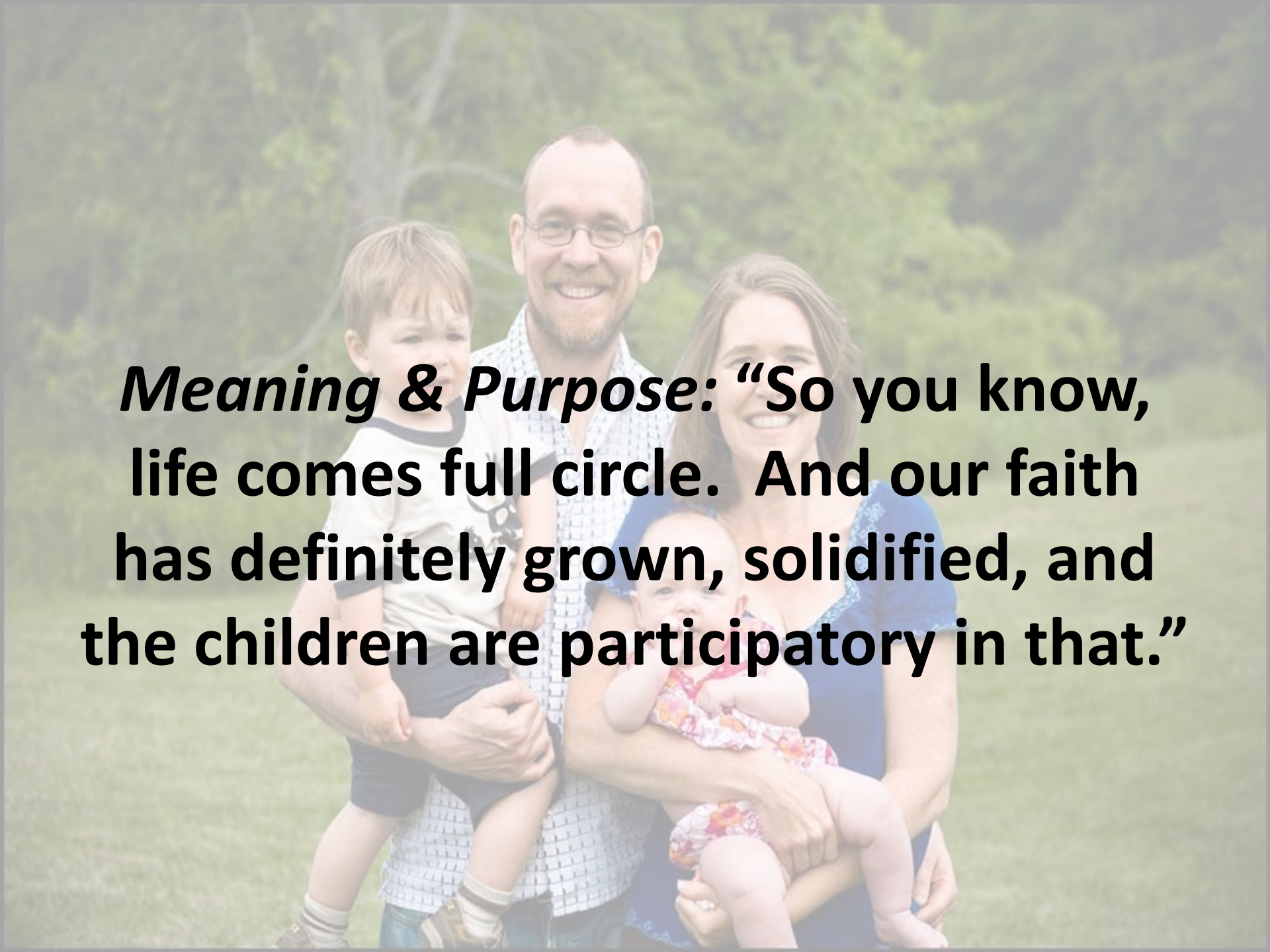
***Hope:* “Never thought I was going to be a mom. They gave me the best. They give me love. I want to be ok for me and for them. I got to be strong. They are my life and keep me going. They affected me positively.”**

A group of people, including children and adults, smiling and sitting together in what appears to be a school or community setting. The background shows bleachers and some signs, including one with the number 44 and another with 88 and 39. The text is overlaid on the image.

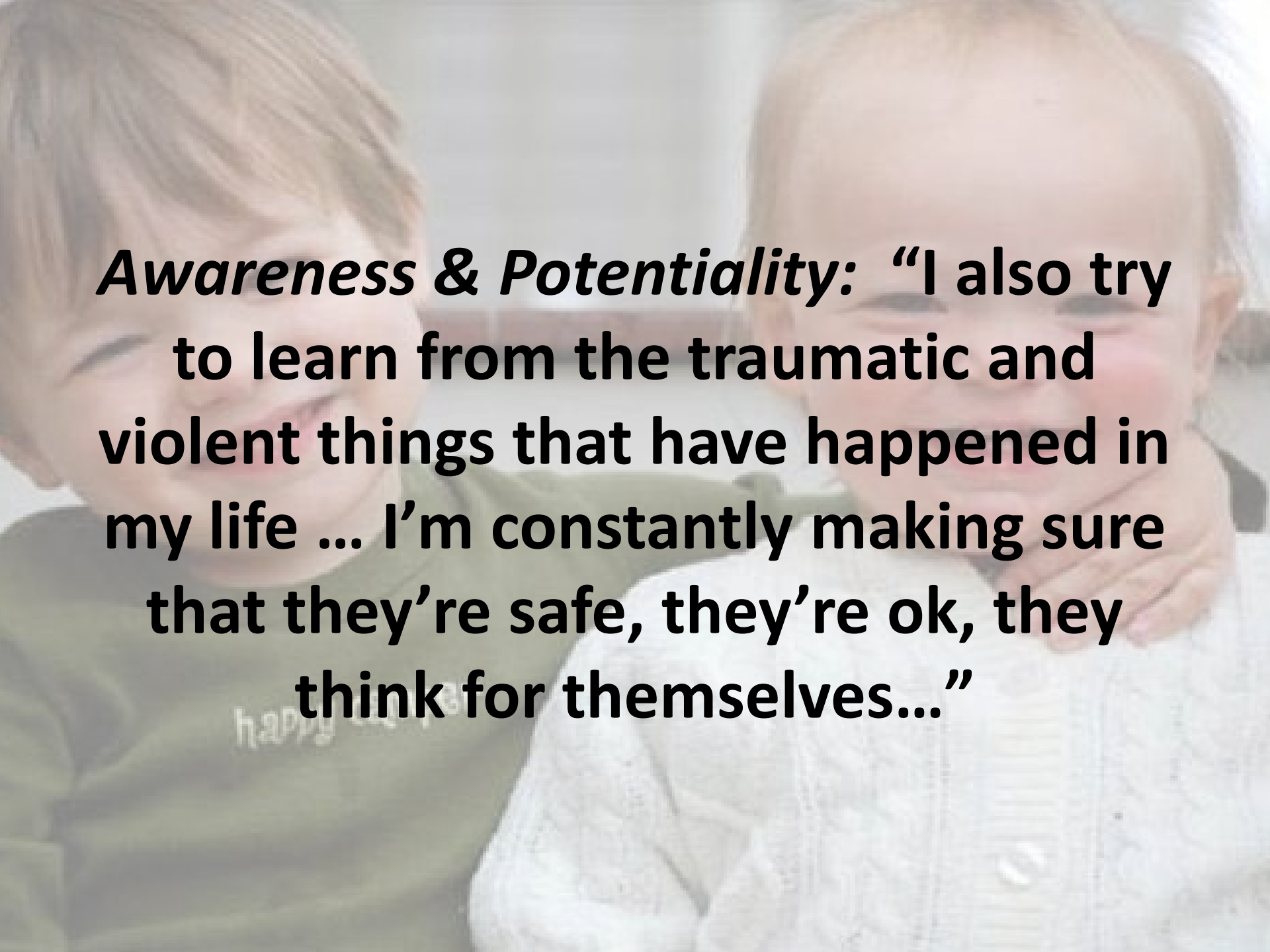
Sense of Agency: “Lately with the children transitioning, my morning is spent on phone calls, follow-ups, appointments, um, medical appointments...looking for, you know, working to get the individual counseling...having to stop to call the school...”

A man and a woman are in a kitchen, preparing food. The man is standing and looking down at something on the counter, while the woman is sitting at a table, holding a blue and white patterned bowl. On the table, there are several blue bowls containing food, a large roasted turkey on a platter, and various cheeses and crackers. The background shows a window with a view of the outdoors.

***Self-determination:* “I’ve learned my limits. I can establish boundaries. I can forgive myself for being human and having the illness, and try to...educate them on mental illness, in those teachable moments.”**

A photograph of a family of four standing in a grassy field with trees in the background. The father, wearing glasses and a patterned shirt, is holding a young boy in a white shirt. The mother, wearing a blue top, is holding a baby in a floral dress. The text is overlaid on the image.

Meaning & Purpose: “So you know, life comes full circle. And our faith has definitely grown, solidified, and the children are participatory in that.”



Awareness & Potentiality: “I also try to learn from the traumatic and violent things that have happened in my life ... I’m constantly making sure that they’re safe, they’re ok, they think for themselves...”

Recommendations: The Key Elements of Inclusive Livable Communities

- **Housing**
- **Employment**

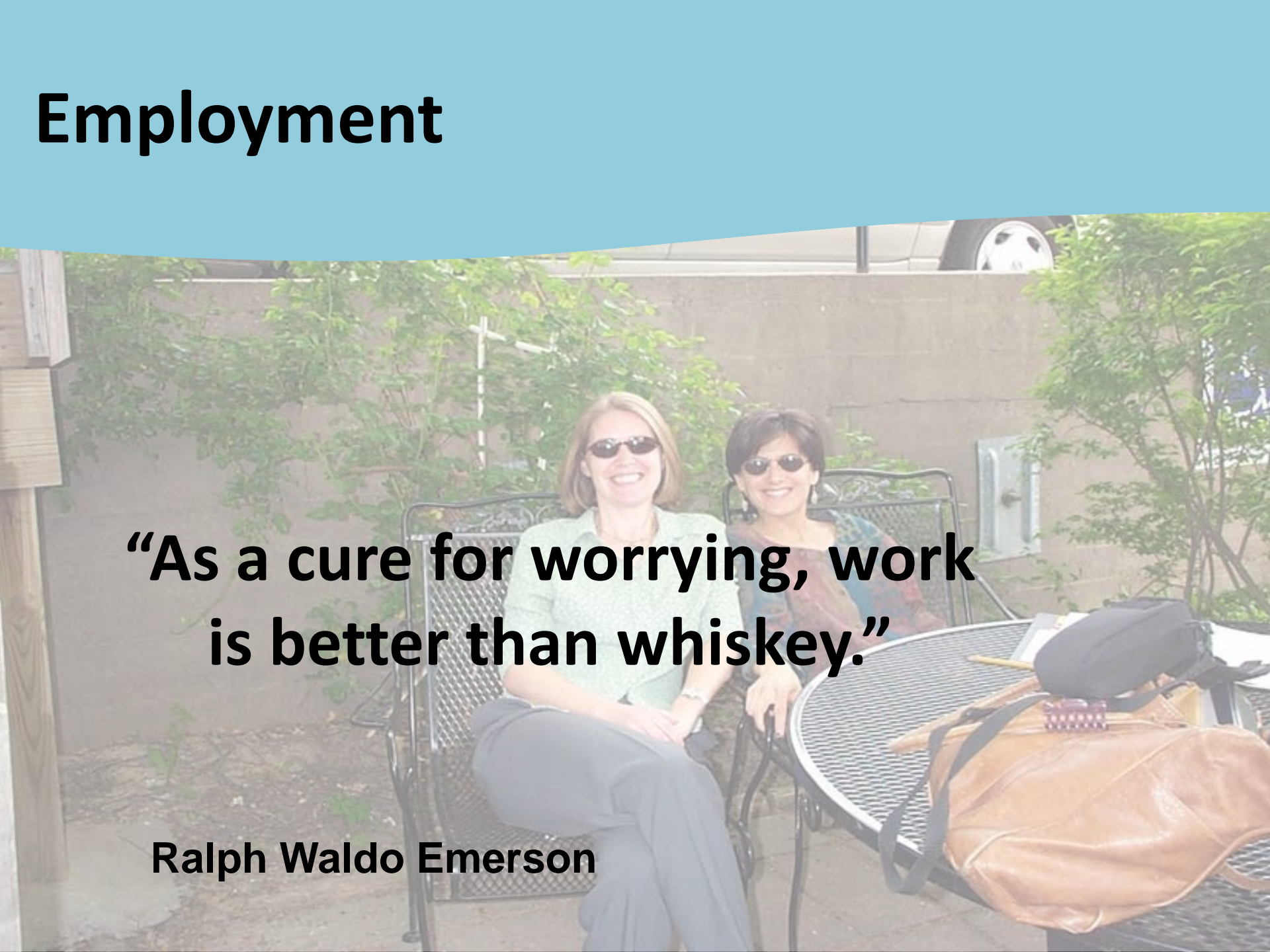
(U.S. National Council on Disability, March 17, 2008)

Housing

**“The ache for home lives in
all of us, the safe place
where we can go as we are
and not be questioned.”**

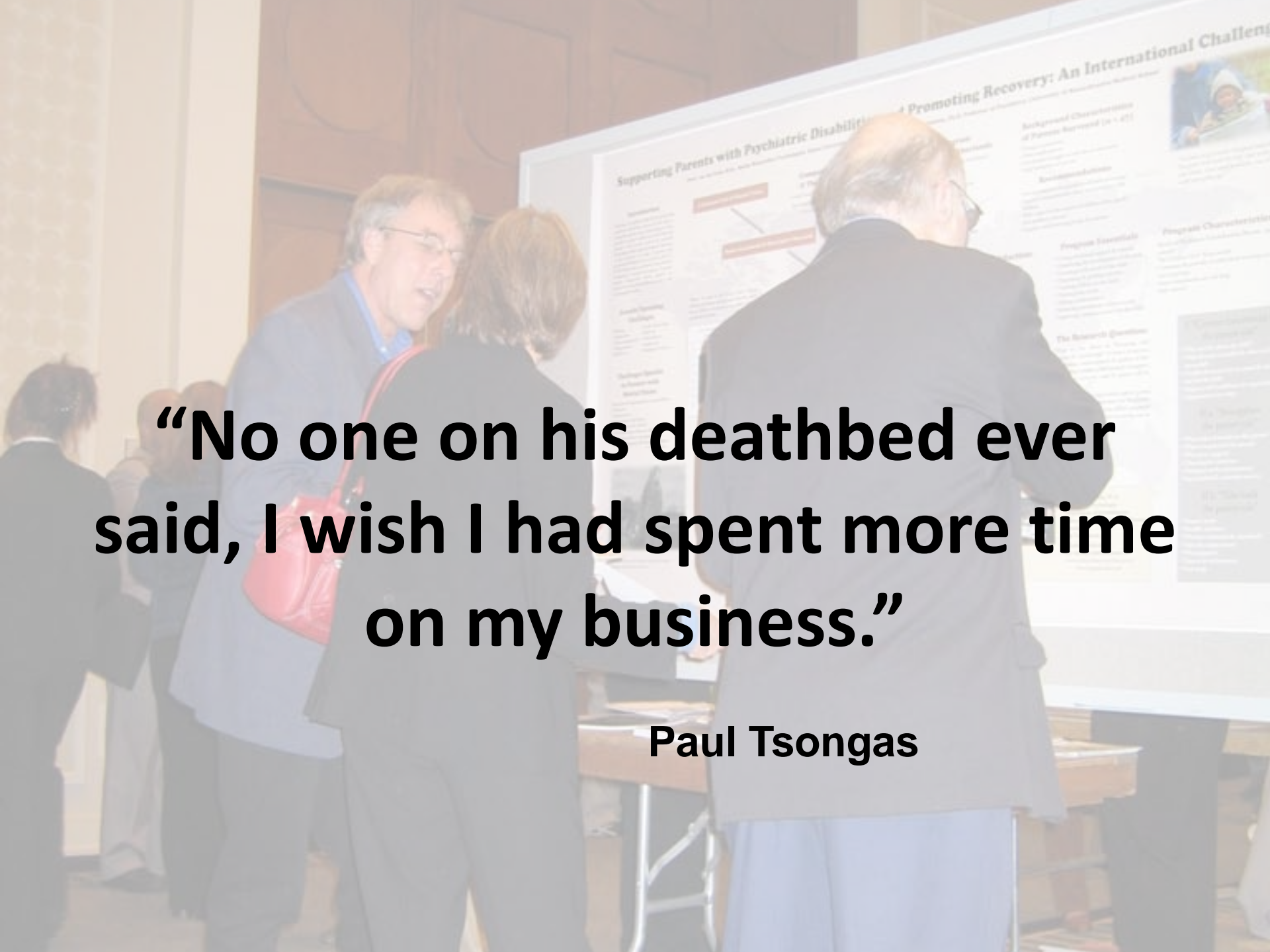
Maya Angelou

Employment

A photograph of two women sitting at an outdoor metal table. The woman on the left is wearing a light green patterned shirt and grey pants, and the woman on the right is wearing a blue patterned top. They are both wearing sunglasses and smiling. On the table in front of them is a large brown leather bag, a black bag, and some papers. The background shows a concrete wall, some greenery, and a car wheel.

**“As a cure for worrying, work
is better than whiskey.”**

Ralph Waldo Emerson



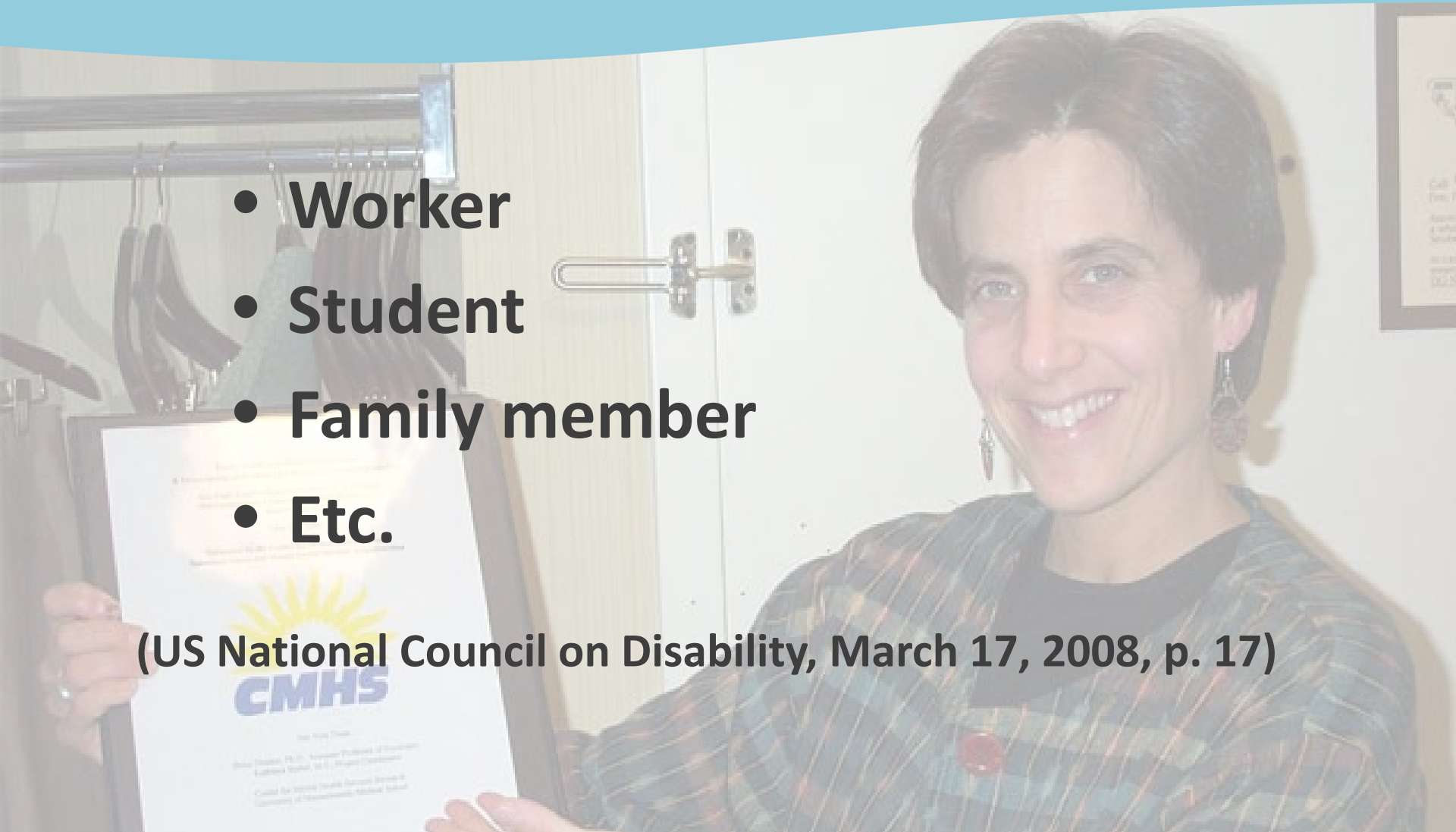
“No one on his deathbed ever said, I wish I had spent more time on my business.”

Paul Tsongas

“Fulfilling valued social roles is the key element in the recovery model.”

- **Worker**
- **Student**
- **Family member**
- **Etc.**

(US National Council on Disability, March 17, 2008, p. 17)




Family roles are valued social roles

- **Educate – question assumptions**
- **Coordinate – help families navigate our systems**
- **Collaborate – build bridges among services & supports**
- **Partner – with families to achieve their goals**

Make it personal to make it happen!

How to start?



“My children give me strength, they give me hope, they give me the will to survive...”

a mother with mental illness

Citation:

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