Sharing Stories:

A digital intervention to support parents and caregivers of young children in the COVID-19 era

The LEGO Foundation

Marguerite Marlow
Institute for Life Course Health Research
Stellenbosch University, South Africa
Parenting in a pandemic

Challenges:
- lack of childcare
- keeping children safe
- keeping children stimulated
- dealing with loss of income
- coping with household stress

How to support parents?
The Sharing Stories Intervention:

A fully digital group-based intervention, delivered over WhatsApp

Parent engagement through digital books

Support for caregiver’s mental wellbeing

It’s okay to ask for help!

It is not always easy to manage stress, worry, or sadness by yourself. If you feel stuck, know that it is okay to ask for help.

Talk to someone you trust about how you are feeling, and they may be able to help you. Sometimes just by talking with someone else, you might feel better.
Delivery:

Group-based, delivered over **six weeks**

Caregivers are enrolled into **WhatsApp groups** (30-40 parents per group),

A weekly WhatsApp **group chat session** is used to deliver the intervention content, complimented by recap messages throughout the week.

Caregivers receive two **digital picture books** a week.
Playful, responsive parenting:

When sharing stories...
Use a lively, playful voice to make it FUN

A lively voice helps keep your child interested, and will help your child learn.

When sharing stories...
Respond in a positive way!

Kindness helps children feel safe and confident, which helps them learn.
Watch this video for an example of a lively voice. Even if you might not understand the language, you will be able to hear from the sound of her voice how to make it lively and playful.

Let’s hear from the group! Do you think your child will enjoy this activity?

Learning something new can be a bit scary and even intimidating while at the same time exciting. How are you feeling about trying this out?

Do you have any questions about how to sit, or how to use a lively voice?

Examples of WhatsApp intervention content:
Playful, responsive parenting:

**When sharing stories...**

**Follow your child’s lead.**

Take notice of what your child is interested in and talk about it.

"Can you see Lulu? Where is Lulu?"

"Look! There’s Lulu! She is hiding!"

**When sharing stories...**

**Mimic the actions in the story with your child**

So, if the book characters are hugging, you could give your child a hug.
Playful, responsive parenting:

When sharing stories...

Talk about the feelings you see in the pictures
Use the pictures to talk to your child about different kinds of feelings and why people might feel a certain way

Quality time is when you:
- Focus your attention on your child
- Take turns with your child
- Praise and encourage your child
- Have fun together!
Program development and testing:

Zambia, Uganda, Tanzania

Parents and caregivers of young children (9mo-3yrs)
*access to smartphone

*child language and socio-emotional development
*positive, responsive parenting
*parenting stress, mental health and wellbeing