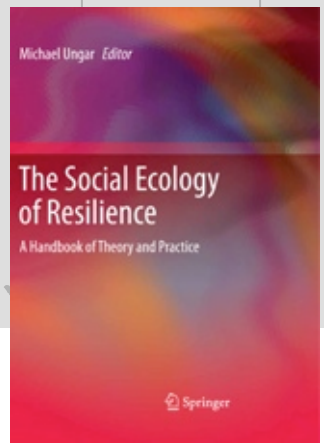
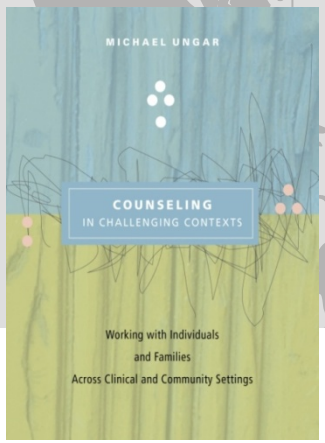
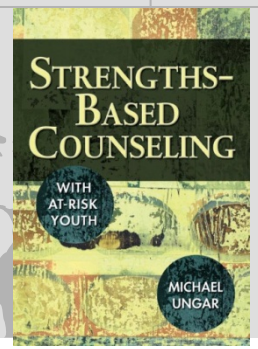
The Social Ecology of Resilience: Families, Schools, Communities and Service Providers

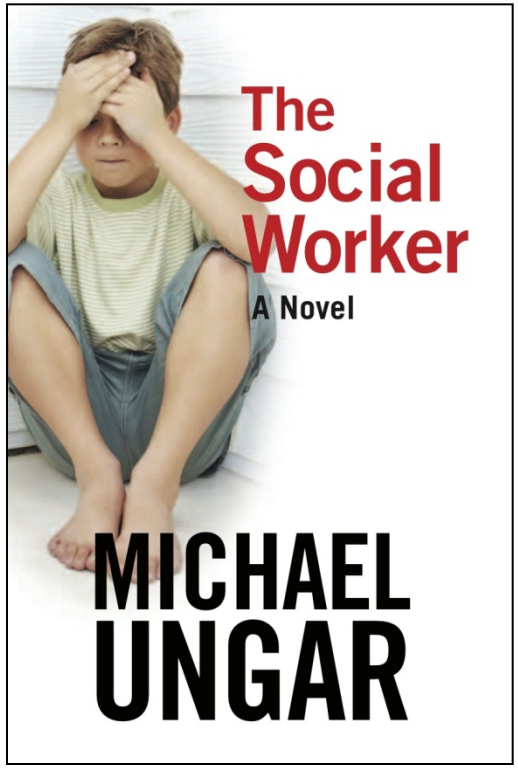
Thinker in Residence Series
Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia

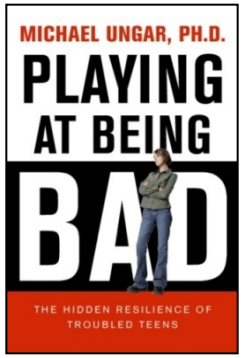
Michael Ungar, Ph.D.
School of Social Work, Dalhousie University
Twitter @MichaelUngarPhD
www.michaelungar.com
www.resilienceresearch.org

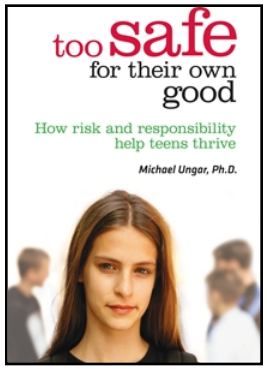


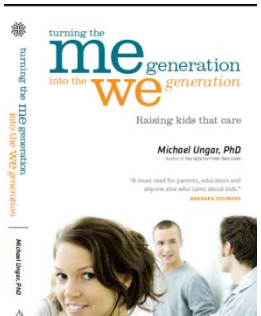




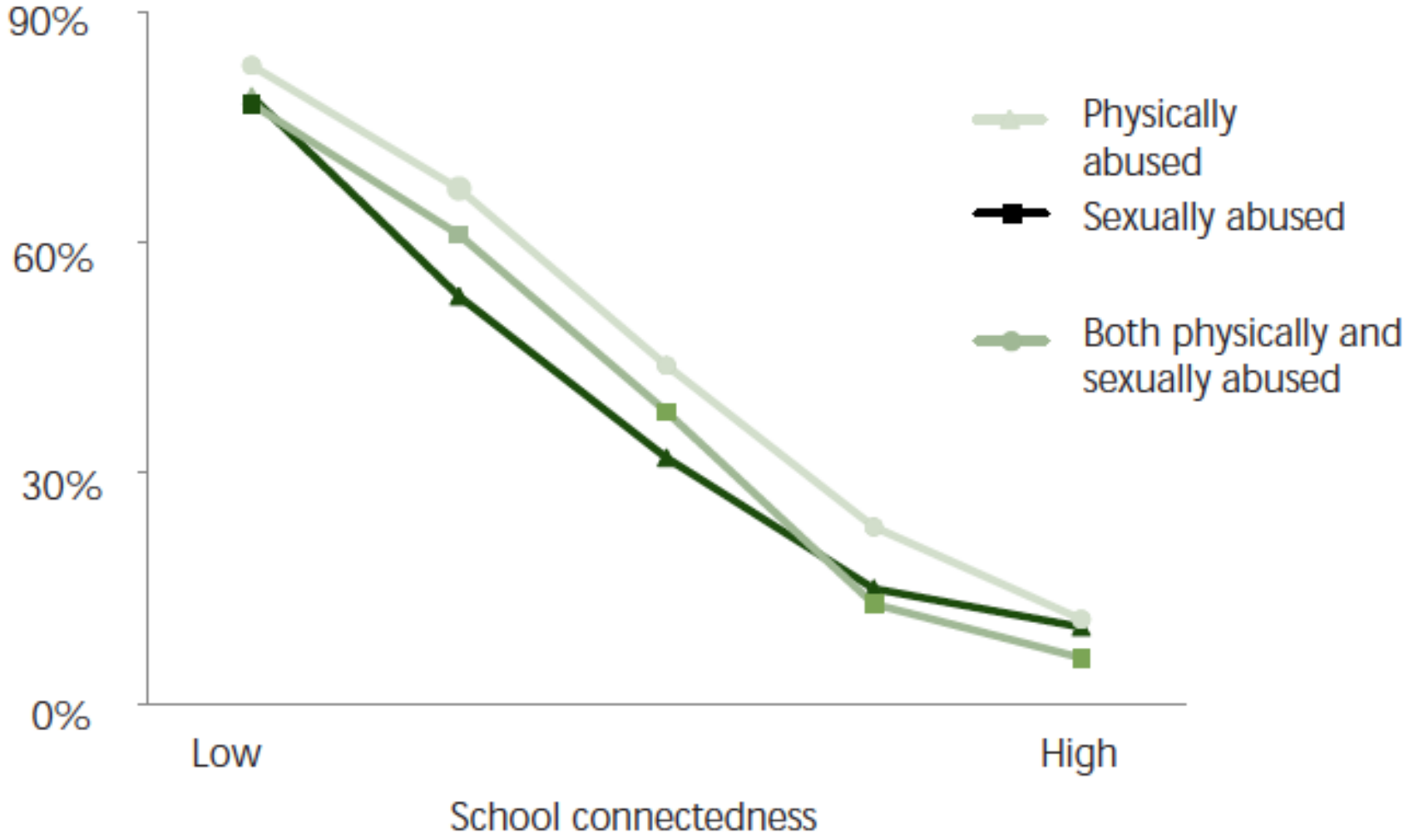








Suicidal ideation and school connectedness among abused students



2008 British Columbia Adolescent Health Survey

Resilience Research Centre

5 things we know about resilience

#1. When we shape a child's social ecology, we influence resilience

- 'Nurture trumps nature'
- 'Grit' and 'Perseverance' can be taught

Resilience Research Centre

5 things we know about resilience

#2. The more troubled a individual, the more our efforts to help count

- Resources have a differential impact on resilience depending on the level of exposure to adversity

Resilience Research Centre

5 things we know about resilience

#3. It takes a family, a community, and a school to nurture resilience

- Resources are cumulative
- Ecologically complex, multi-level interventions are often most helpful when exposure to adversity is high

Resilience Research Centre

5 things we know about resilience

#4. Context and culture influence which protective processes have the most impact on outcomes

Resilience Research Centre

5 things we know about resilience

#5. Long-term, not all adaptations are advantageous to sustaining resilience

- Resilience is responsive to sociohistorical and developmental factors
- Adaptive and maladaptive behaviours can both be successful coping strategies depending on the context in which they are used

Resilience Research Centre

Psychological Resilience is…

- In the context of exposure to significant adversity
- resilience is the capacity of individuals to *navigate* their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well being, and...
- their capacity individually and in groups to *negotiate* for these resources to be provided...
- in culturally meaningful ways.

Resilience Research Centre

Labels given to High-risk Youth by community/families

- Loser
- Charity case
- Brat
- Stupid
- Victim
- Slut
- Drop-out
- Thief
- Little f—er

Resilience Research Centre

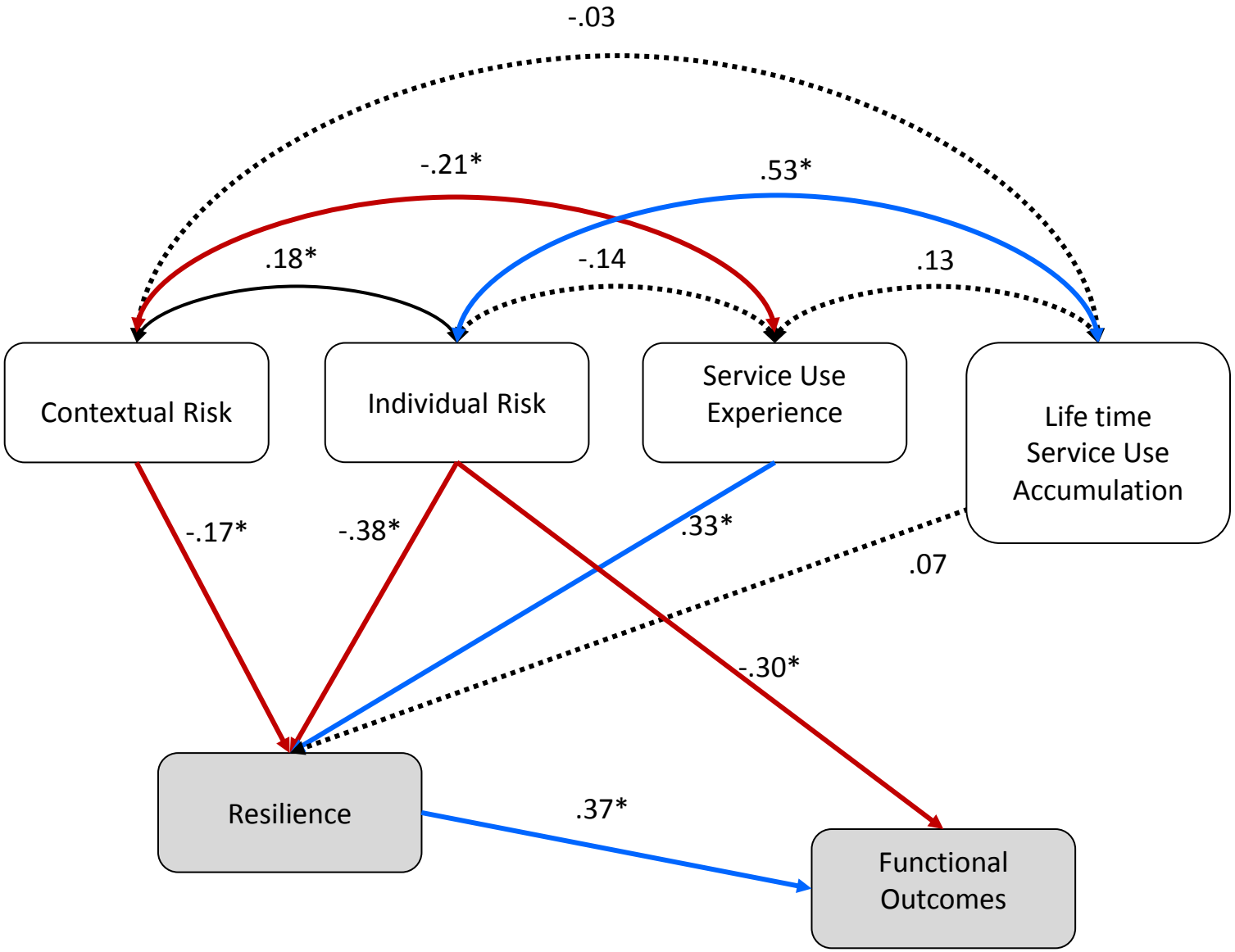
Labels given to High-risk Youth by professionals

- Conduct disordered
- Parentified
- A.D.H.D
- Depressed
- Suicidal
- Borderline
- Antisocial
- Bi-polar
- Emotionally disturbed
- Dysfunctional
- Resistant
- Lacking impulse control
- Difficult

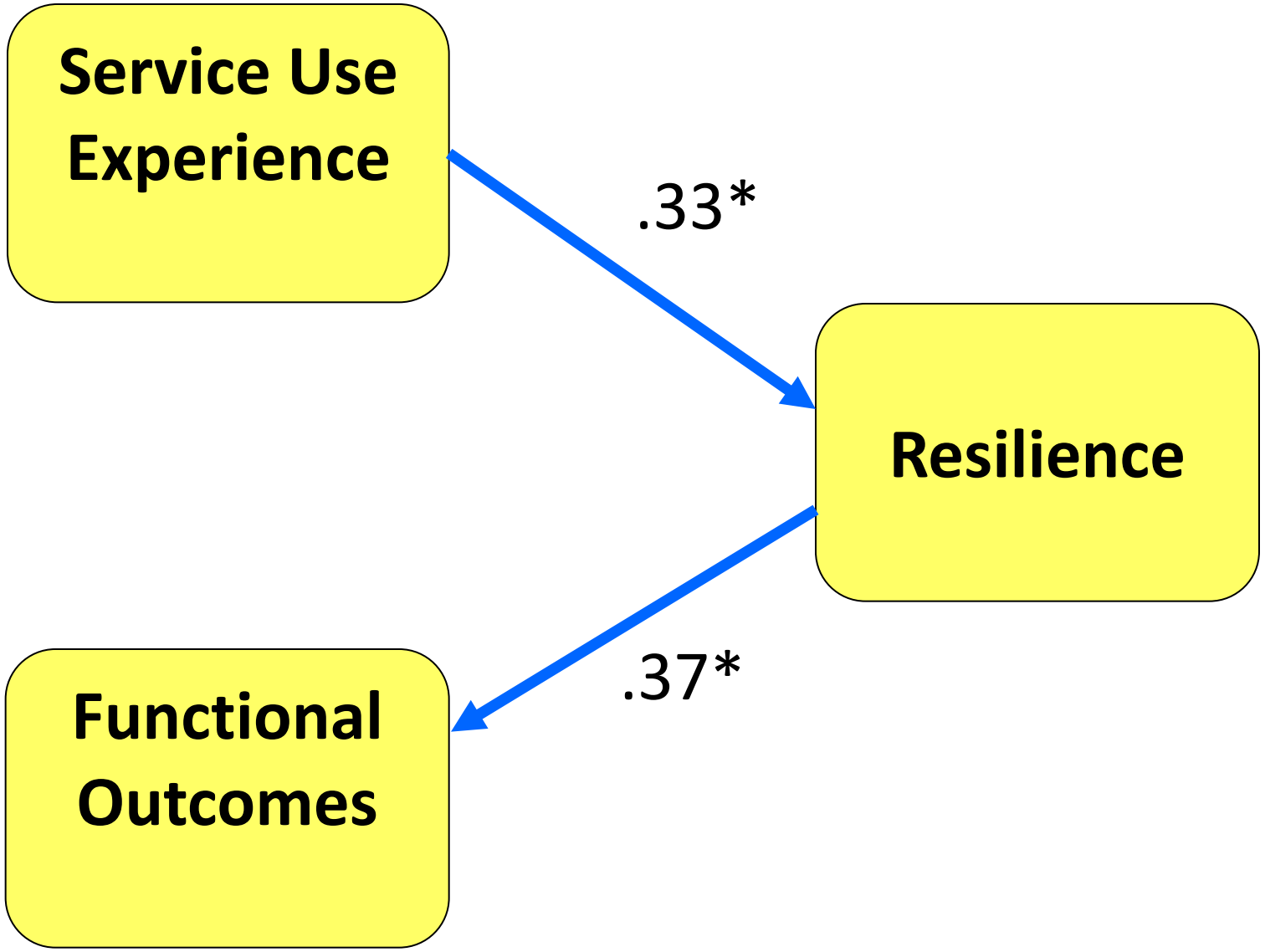
Resilience Research Centre

Labels High-risk Youth prefer

- Leader
- Tough
- Gang member
- Dealer
- Sexy
- Survivor
- Stud
- Street kid
- Helper
- Drinker
- Fighter


-.03
-.21*
.53*
.18*
-.14
.13
Contextual Risk
Individual Risk
Service Use Experience
Life time Service Use Accumulation
-.17*
-.38*
.33*
.07
-.30*
Resilience
.37*
Functional Outcomes

Resilience Research Centre



Resilience Research Centre

Nine Things All Children Need

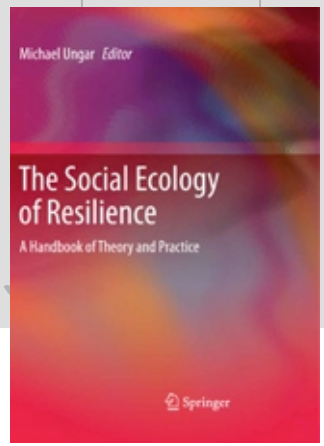
1. Structure
2. Consequences
3. Parent-child connections
4. Lots and lots of nurturing relationships
5. A powerful identity
6. A sense of control
7. A sense of belonging/cultural roots/spirituality/life purpose
8. Fair and just treatment
9. Physical and psychological safety

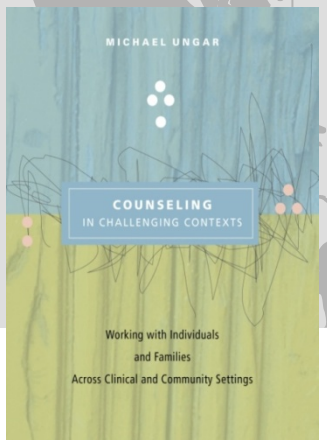
© Michael Ungar, 2011
www.michaelungar.com

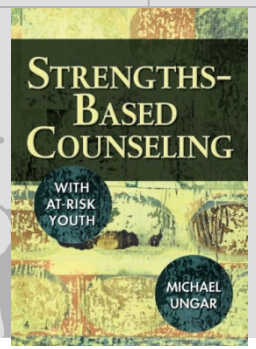
When a resource is unavailable, inaccessible, or potentially harmful, children will cope as best they can with what they have.

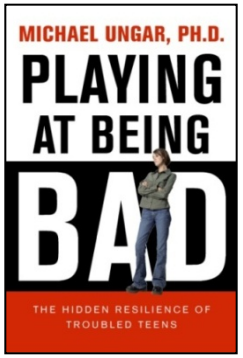
It is always better to offer substitute ways of coping rather than trying to suppress troubling behaviours

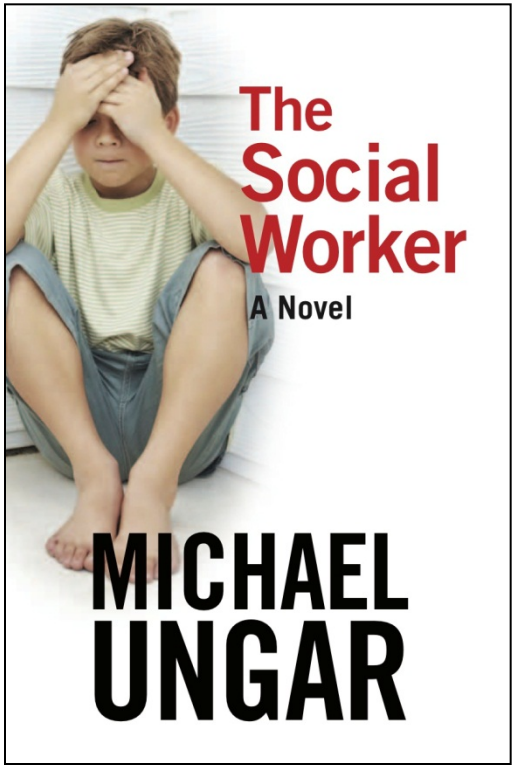
Thank you!

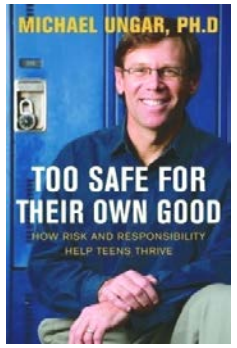


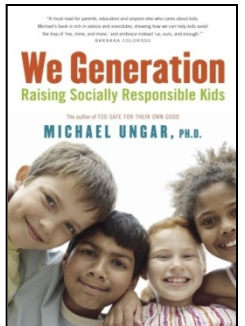












Resilience Research Centre

Michael Ungar, Ph.D.
Killam Professor,
School of Social Work, Dalhousie University
Twitter @MichaelUngarPhD
www.michaelungar.com
www.resilienceresearch.org