



## Relational Team-Based Care that Centers Parent Voice in Pediatric Clinics

By David Willis, MD, FAAP, Senior Fellow at Center for the Study of Social Policy

Pediatrics Supporting Parents (PSP) is an initiative focused on using well-child visits as a universal access point for pediatricians and parents to work together to support a child's social and emotional well-being in the first years of life. Recognizing well-child visits as a meaningful opportunity to promote Early Relational Health (ERH), the PSP initiative is one example of the innovative ERH programming happening within a growing Nurture Connection network.

Created in 2017, PSP is a funding collective, including the [Conrad N. Hilton Foundation](#), [Einhorn Collaborative](#), [Overdeck Family Foundation](#), [Perigee Fund](#), the [David and Lucile Packard Foundation](#), and the [W.K. Kellogg Foundation](#). PSP is supporting five communities that represent a diversity of location and types of local healthcare systems to serve as "proof point communities (PPCs)" to demonstrate ways to transform the well-child visits as a means for enhancing ERH. These communities are acting as co-creators of PSP's overall investment strategy and approach. The PPCs are:

- Durham Collaborative Network for Early Relational Health | Durham County, NC
- Early Childhood Alliance Onondaga | Onondaga County, NY
- LIFT / ACEs LA Medical-Financial Partnership and Network of Care | Los Angeles, CA
- UCSF - The Ready, Resilient, & Rising! Network (R3 Network) | San Francisco and Alameda Counties, CA
- First Year Families - Washington Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (WCAAP), Pediatrics Northwest | Pierce County, WA

Two members of the Washington Chapter, [Mary Ann Woodruff, MD, FAAP](#), general pediatrician with Pediatrics Northwest, and [Shayla Collins](#), a family partner and parent leader, are new members of Nurture Connection's National ERH Network. Both recently shared how their teams are transforming well-child visits in Pierce County.

In speaking with parents, members of WCAAP learned that there was a fundamental need to build healthier, more trusted relationships between parents and pediatricians in order to better support a child's social and emotional development. A necessary first step toward strengthening this partnership meant recognizing how inequitable gaps in resources and everyday racial bias impact different caregiving communities, especially Black and Brown communities, and ensuring that care providers honor, respect, listen, and support families without judgment.

To transform the current well-child visit model, Pediatrics Northwest is implementing an evidence-based pediatric primary care medical home approach by creating teams of care to support parents in clinics as soon as they begin their pediatric journey. Not only is there an emphasis on promoting ERH, but also the coordination of a continuum of services and

interventions for those families of greatest need. At the center of these teams is a community health worker (CHW). CHWs act as compassionate listeners and navigators, translating and uplifting parent needs to the rest of the family's team of care. Partnership can take a variety of forms, such as following up with parents on mental health referrals rather than putting the burden on parents.

Dr. Woodruff shared that one of the most powerful impacts of their work is how families feel visible and respected. For example, when Spanish-speaking CHWs were hired, caregivers shared that they felt more empowered, creating a real sense of hope for their children and family's well-being.

The WCAAP will then take the lessons learned from the clinic's use of team-based care to help develop statewide strategies and sustainability for similar changes across the state.

This transformation of pediatric wellness care requires financial investments and champions at the state and community levels and within clinic practice as well. Already we're seeing policy change within Washington that will further this type of new team-of-care approach to the well-child visits. The state legislature has funded nearly 40 CHWs for two years (2022–24) to be embedded in primary care practices across the state. Six of the eight CHWs at Pediatrics Northwest are funded through this pathway, in effect, demonstrating how to advance ERH policy into practice.

The hope for PSP and the larger Nurture Connection network is to continue to scale practices that transform the well-child visits so that they enhance ERH. Such practice changes will require supportive state and national policy — all of which must be designed with parent input and wisdom in order to ensure that families receive the care that they need and deserve.

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## Parent Perspective

**Question:** What are your thoughts about the importance of team-based care in child health care that might include a community health worker as partner, advocate or navigator for trust building and supporting relational health?



**Family Network Collaborative response:** Team-based care is very important because Navigators or Care Coordinators are not perceived as authority figures, so families are less worried about openly sharing their concerns. Therefore, they can trust the person and get connected to the services they need.

To learn more about the Family Network Collaborative at Nurture Connection, visit our website [here](#).

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## Explore More



### What is Early Relational Health?

[Early Relational Health](#) is the state of emotional well-being that grows from

## Nurture Conversations

HOPE Network & Organizational Change in San Diego

Wednesday, June 19 2 PM ET  
Live on Facebook and YouTube



### Nurture Conversations July 2023: HOPE Network and Organizational Change in San Diego

This month's episode of Nurture Conversations featured Robert Sege, MD, PhD, and Aimee Zeitz-Gruber, MFT. They gave an update on the work of the [HOPE](#) (Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences) National Resource Center and discussed the organizational transformation of the YMCA of San Diego County to include HOPE in all of their interactions.

[Watch the Recording Here](#)



### The Power of a Child's First Two Months of Life

A new blog by David Willis, MD, FAAP reflects on the transformative power of strong and nurturing relationships during a child's first two months. Drawing from the insights of Bruce D. Perry, MD, PhD, and his Neurosequential Model, the blog explores how emotional connections formed in the first two months of life lay the foundation for a resilient central nervous system, helping children manage stress and navigate life's challenges.

[Read Here](#)

emotional connection between babies and toddlers and their parents and caregivers when they experience strong, positive, and nurturing relationships with each other.

ERH is foundational to children's healthy growth and development and parents' and caregivers' sense of competence, connection, and overall well-being. These strong and enduring relationships also help to protect the family from the harmful effects of stress.

### Core ERH Resources

Frameworks Institute. [Building Relationships: Framing Early Relational Health](#). Prepared in collaboration with the Center for the Study of Social Policy. May 2020.

Willis D, Chavez S, Lee J, Hampton P, Fine A. [Early Relational Health National Survey: What We're Learning from the Field](#). Center for the Study of Social Policy. 2020.

Willis D, Sege R, Johnson K. [Changing the Mindset: Foundational Relationships Counter Adversity with HOPE](#). (Blog) Center for the Study of Social Policy. May 2020.

Perspectives on ERH Video Series. [Perspectives on Early Relational Health Series](#). Center for the Study of Social Policy. 2022.

Center of the Study of Social Policy and Health+ Studio. [How to Communicate Effectively About Early Relational Health: What It Is and Why It Matters](#). 2022.

Find additional resources on our [website](#).

## What We're Reading

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- Ellwood-Lowe, M. E., Foushee, R. & Srinivasan, M. (January 2022) What causes the word gap? Financial concerns may systematically suppress child-directed speech. *Developmental Science*. [Read here.](#)
  - Kaminski, J., et al. (June 2023). Vital Signs for Pediatric Health: School Readiness, *National Academy of Medicine 2023* [Read here.](#)
  - Rosenbaum, S., & Johnson, K. (July 2023) A Twenty-First Century Medicaid Child Health Policy: Modernizing EPSDT. *Milbank Quarterly Opinion*. [Read here.](#)
  - Heath, C. & Heath, D. (2017). The Power of Moments: Why certain experiences have extraordinary impact. [See book here.](#)
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[The Center for the Study of Social Policy \(CSSP\)](#), which conceived Nurture Connection, is a national, non-profit policy organization that connects community action, public system reform, and policy change to create a fair and just society in which all children and families thrive. We work to achieve a racially, economically, and socially just society in which all children and families thrive. To do this, we translate ideas into action, promote public policies grounded in equity, support strong and inclusive communities, and advocate with and for all children and families marginalized by public policies and institutional practices.



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