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Nurture
Connection

The Early Relational
Health Movement
e-Newsletter



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February 22, 2024 | Issue 12

Reflections on "Early Relational Health: A Review of Research, Principles, and Perspectives" Report

In December, we hosted "Nurture Connection Presents: ERH Research, Principles, and Perspectives," a [webinar](#) presenting key takeaways and reflections from [The Burke Foundation's "Early Relational Health: A Review of Research, Principles, and Perspectives" report](#) by early childhood researchers Junlei Li, PhD, and Thelma Ramirez of the [Harvard Graduate School of Education](#).

Below you will find additional reflections on the "ERH Principles" report from across four different perspectives and fields Nurture Connection brings together in our network of networks.

Brenda Blasingame, MA – Principal and Founder at Vav Amani Consulting LLC and Nurture Connection Core Planning Team member

"The principles and applications are explicitly family- and community-focused in an unapologetic manner from beginning to end."

It is rare to read a report with a title that leaves me feeling seen, acknowledged, and respected. The principles and applications are explicitly family- and community-focused in an unapologetic manner from beginning to end. Calling out the need for a balance between evidence-based interventions and community-based strategies is critically important to work on Early Relational Health (as well as the field of early childhood). To achieve what we want, we must stay true to principles and practices that "adapt to and meet the diverse needs of families and communities." The importance in our field of moving from a focus on adversity, risk, and deficits to "protective supports and ecological solutions" and the *intentional promotion of positive childhood experiences* is where we need to be focusing our attention and intention. Our work is to create the context and conditions for these things to occur if we are to succeed in achieving equitable outcomes for children, families, and communities.

Andrew Garner, MD, PhD, FAAP – Clinical Professor of Pediatrics at Case Western Reserve University and Nurture Connection ERH National Network member

"Anyone who works with small children and their families will find something in this report that resonates deeply with what they do and why they do it."

This report is clear, comprehensive, and synergistic. It integrates the strengths of numerous other frames into this "new" rubric that we are calling ERH. For example, it draws on the strengths of cutting-edge science, conventional wisdom, recent calls for equity, the need to be strengths-based, and a practical focus on the economic return on investment. Anyone who works with small children and their families will find something in this report that resonates deeply with what they do and why they do it. As a pediatrician, I think this report is both liberating and disorienting. Most pediatricians know in their hearts that ERH is absolutely foundational to all that they do every day. Yet every day they are actively discouraged from embracing these strength-based principles by a healthcare system that is squarely deficits-based. There is little room — or reimbursement — for strengths-based efforts like promoting ERH, listening with compassion, or employing empathic curiosity when pediatric care is embedded in a deficits-based system like healthcare. The cognitive dissonance between what pediatricians *know in their hearts* and actually *do to keep the lights on* is simply disorientating.

Kaitlin Mulcahy, PhD – Director, Center for Autism and Early Childhood Mental Health at Montclair State University and Nurture Connection ERH National Network member

"This report can help increase the awareness, understanding, and financial commitment necessary to continue creating a community of care for all of our families at the earliest moments of family formation."

My first reaction to the "ERH Principles" report was one of astounding gratitude. I found the amount of thought, scholarship, and care that has gone into the emergence of the movement of Early Relational Health to be beautifully distilled, communicated, and explained. The piece that resonated with me the most was the visual of the braiding of the principles. So often, we learn principles as building blocks or parallel points. It was refreshing to see the image of a braid depicting the integration of principles, reminding us to keep them all connected. The report's description of Early Relational Health as a framework that allows for flexibility and openness for new ideas to flow into the framework is also unique and important. Finally, the report clearly communicated what we often say in New Jersey — that early relational health is everyone's business. To this mantra, we have recently added: "...and should also be in everyone's budgets!" This report can help increase the awareness, understanding, and financial commitment necessary to continue creating a community of care for all of our families at the earliest moments of family formation.

Hoda Shawky, MSN, CPNP, PMHS, IBCLC – Pediatric Nurse Practitioner, Doula, Consultant, and Nurture Connection ERH National Network member

"The report consistently and so beautifully centers human relationships."

So many concepts related to either community, parent, and/or infant/early childhood well-being have gained popularity in the past few years. What this report has done is bring the concepts all together into a cohesive story of how all of these ideas are related. Perhaps most importantly, it does so using a strengths-based, rather than a problem-focused, lens. The report consistently and so beautifully centers human relationships. That is why I love the principles, which bring together these truths based on research and community wisdom. To me, each principle is a powerful statement that we will stand behind each of these beliefs when we think about how we are supporting families and communities in the early years. Whether it is working with families, working with stakeholders on addressing

early childhood systems issues, or mentoring the next generation of professionals, this report confirms for me that in order for systems work (whether early childhood or health) to succeed, we must have the courage to let our relationships lead and allow our hearts to follow.

Parent Perspective

Question: Why are you involved in the Family Network Collaborative?

Nicole Loveless - Parent leader in New Mexico representing the Indigenous community: "I do this work because I want the Native American parents' voice to be heard. I want to help reduce generational abuse and connect with other Native parents with our struggles and accomplishments in parenting."



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

Explore More



[Parent-Infant Interactions Without Toys Beneficial for Shared Emotional Experiences Alongside Play with Toys](#)

A new Nurture Connection blog by Cynthia A. Frosch, PhD, IMH-E® explores the world of parent-infant interactions. Delving into decades of research, Dr. Frosch introduces her team's work on the "I SEE You" project, shedding light on Shared Emotional Experiences (SEEs) during parent-infant interactions with and without toys.

[Read Here](#)



What is Early Relational Health?

Early Relational Health is the state of emotional well-being that grows from 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.

OARN

Oregon Association of Relief Nurseries

[ERH in Action with the Oregon Association of Relief Nurseries: The Best-Kept Secret There Is for Early Relational Health](#)

This blog on [Oregon Association of Relief Nurseries](#) (OARN) is part of Nurture Connection's "ERH in Action" series of listening and learning sessions designed to highlight and uplift bright spots in the movement. Discover the transformative work of the Association's 16 nonprofit nurseries across the state, serving 3,000 children annually through therapeutic classrooms, in-home visits, and parent education.

[Read Here](#)



Nurture Connection Presents:
State Leadership and Policy Action to Advance ERH

<http://tinyurl.com/erh-policy>

Tuesday, 1/30
3-4 pm ET

				
Elisabeth Wright Burak Senior Fellow, Center for Children and Families, McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown University	Karen Howard Founding Partner, Crossover Partners, LLC	Kay Johnson President, Johnson Group Consulting	Geoff Nagle Adjunct Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry, Tulane University	David W. Willis Senior Fellow, Center for the Study of Social Policy, and Founder, Nurture Connection

[Nurture Connection Presents: State Leadership and Policy Action to Advance Early Relational Health](#)

On January 30th Nurture Connection hosted a webinar exploring the "[State Leadership](#)" report. The webinar included an overview of the [ERH policy agenda, guidance on how to talk to policymakers about ERH](#), and summary of recent state policy actions as well as a panel discussion on how ERH policy priorities fit with federal and state policy advocacy in the coming year. The panel included:

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](#).

Elisabeth Wright Burak of Georgetown University, Karen Howard of Crossover Partners, Kay Johnson of Johnson Policy Consulting, Geoff Nagle of Tulane University, and David W. Willis of the Center for the Study of Social Policy and founder of Nurture Connection.

[Watch the Recording](#)

What We're Reading

- Nehls, S., et al. (February 2024). Time-sensitive changes in the maternal brain and their influence on mother-child attachment. *Translational Psychiatry*. [Read here.](#)
- White, S.C. & Jha, S. (October 2023). Exploring the Relational in Relational Wellbeing. *Social Sciences*. [Read here.](#)
- Paternina-Die, M., et al. (January 2024), Women's neuroplasticity during gestation, childbirth and postpartum. *Nature Neuroscience*. [Read 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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