



Reflections on a Year of Abundance

At the close of 2024 — a year of both progress and change for Nurture Connection — we're reaffirming our unwavering commitment to advancing Early Relational Health (ERH) with utmost clarity.

A major reason why we're steadfast is we've seen the power of bringing together communities committed to relational abundance — with families at the center. For us, “relational abundance” means surrounding children in their early years with a strong community of positive, nurturing relationships. These emotional connections between caregivers and children are at the core of ERH — and are essential for building healthier, thriving communities.

Our own Dominique Charlot-Swilley, PhD — a member of the Nurture Connection Steering Committee and a part of the team at Thrive Center for Children, Families, and Communities at Georgetown University — beautifully communicated a broader vision of relational abundance:

“Nurture Connection can help reframe ‘wealth’ in terms of ‘relational abundance’ rather than material accumulation. By shifting from individualistic frameworks to a more holistic, community-centered approach to health, we help promote wellness — not just within individuals but across entire communities.”

We can strengthen family well-being through collective caregiving, community-led solutions, and policies that help children and families feel connected. This year, we're grateful for the abundance of community support that showed up for families:

Parent and Caregiver Community

From providing resources for parent-infant interactions to fostering supportive fatherhood to addressing the parental stress crisis — we're proud to say that 2024 was the year of prioritizing the parent community and their expertise and leadership in helping build more connected, healthier communities:



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



[ERH in Action with Washington Fatherhood Council: Fathers Play Major Role in Fostering Early Relational Health](#)



[The Public Health Crisis of Parental Stress: Listening to Parents Promotes Early Relational Health](#)

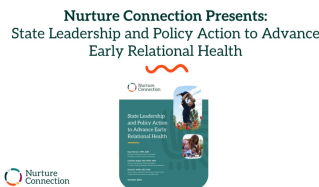
We're especially grateful for the parent leaders in Nurture Connection's Family Network Collaborative, who continue to honor the wisdom and knowledge in their respective network of families and communities — and are teaching us about the importance of centering and lifting up “relational abundance,” which exists within each and every one of our communities.

Early Childhood Policy and Research

We also engaged the early childhood community and amplified their visionary work, which spanned practice transformation initiatives, systems change strategies, and building understanding around ERH through groundbreaking research. From policy papers on birthing justice to insightful reports like transforming the care of young children in community health centers, our impact network has brought new knowledge to the forefront.



[Putting Principles into Action: Building an Early Relational Health Ecosystem](#)



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



[How to Communicate Effectively with Policymakers About Early Relational Health](#)



[Community-Based Doulas and Early Relational Health: The Role of Public Policy and Financing](#)



[ERH in Action with HealthConnect One: Birth Workers Provide Vital Care to Parents and Newborns](#)



[Guide for Transforming Care of Young Children in Community Health Centers](#)

[Child Flourishing: A Critical Indicator for Early Relational Health](#)

Healthcare Provider Community

Working with — and learning from — pediatricians, infant mental health professionals, and many more healthcare providers has strengthened our collective ability to meet families where they are and honor their lived experiences.



The Trauma- Informed Pediatric Practice



[ERH in Action with Pediatrics Supporting Parents: Parents and Pediatricians Create ERH Partnership in Durham, North Carolina](#)

[The Crucial Role of Discussing Race and Racism in Pediatric Settings to Nurture Connection](#)

[How Do Clinicians Help Prevent Trauma in Their Pediatric Patients? A New Book Leads the Way](#)

Looking Ahead

In October 2024, Nurture Connection [became anchored](#) within Georgetown University's Thrive Center for Children, Families, and Communities. In the coming months, we will build new relationships across the university — from pediatrics and child psychiatry to health policy and law — to continue to advance awareness around ERH and to continue to grow our national network's capacities in parent leadership, practice transformation, workforce development, place-based initiatives, narrative and storytelling, and research that builds new understanding around ERH.

This year, we also welcomed seven new steering committee members, parent leaders, and an expanded ERH workforce to our network — and we're excited to continue growing our community next year.

The National ERH Network is now over 130+ multidisciplinary leaders strong, gathering virtually quarterly to meet new members from across the early childhood field to learn of Nurture Connection's progress and to join conversations about ERH innovations and Bright Spots. Members continue to express their gratitude and excitement from such conversations.

We also know that “relational abundance” can come from within — an inner commitment to staying the course even in face of change and adversity. Thank you for your dedication on this journey with us.

Onward with gratitude,

The Nurture Connection team

In the spirit of “reflecting forward,” our steering committee members share their reflections on what connection — the heart of ERH and abundance — means for them in the current moment.

“Promoting Early Relational Health with parents and caregivers helps decrease generational curses. It helps us reinforce stronger communities within communities.”

–Nicole Loveless

FNC Parent Leader and Steering Committee Member

“Our nation now faces an unprecedented shift to uncertainty and rapidly shifting

“The pandemic has deepened our understanding of relational health. The

priorities as we transition to the new administration and Congress. Yet Nurture Connection remains steadfast to its core beliefs of Early Relational Health to advance the flourishing for children, families, and communities; to promote empathic human development; and to elevate connectedness, belonging, and kindness. It's about doubling down on the basics — the power of nurturing and loving care for those of our present and future.”

–David W. Willis, MD, FAAP
Founder and Director, Nurture Connection

foundations of relational health are established during infancy through early relationships, shaping social and emotional development. These early experiences begin teaching humans how to manage emotions effectively, express themselves appropriately, build positive connections, and develop empathy. It is our responsibility to ensure every child has a strong foundation for lifelong emotional and mental well-being for themselves and our society.”

–Brenda Blasingame, M.A.
Steering Committee Member

“At this moment in time, Nurture Connection is positioned to meaningfully advance the wide-scale promotion of Early Relational Health. We develop and elevate evidence-based strategies that are guided by and resonate with both the parents and caregivers with lived experience of the challenges that face families raising young children and the wide range of communities across the U.S.”

–Nikki Shearman PhD
Steering Committee Member

“Families throughout our country are facing incredible challenges. They are worried about whether they have enough money to meet their children’s basic needs. They live in fear of deportation and worry about the impact of climate change on their family and community. Regardless of where they sit on the political continuum, they wonder how the divisiveness of the presidential campaign will impact their lives and that of their children.

In the context of all this, we know that the bond between a child and their caregivers provides the foundation to a healthy and secure childhood and a joyful and fulfilling experience to the adults in their lives. Nurture Connection not only works to promote the kinds of family-promoting policies that relieve pressures on families but also works to ensure that all services that families need to raise their children encourage the connections that are vital to a stronger family, community, and society.”

–Susan Notkin
Steering Committee Member

“In times of enormous uncertainty and challenges, it is tempting to think that only big and sweeping changes can make any difference. Yet for a child, a family, or a colleague, it is the simple and ordinary moments that truly express care, earn trust, and nourish relational health.”

–Junlei Li
Steering Committee Member

“As human beings, we need connections with others to thrive. Supportive relationships fill us with contentment and gratitude during happy moments in our lives. These same relationships give us strength and comfort to withstand change and uncertainty. These relationships form the basis of our most cherished memories and even shape our sense of ourselves.

We must remember that the work of Nurture Connection to promote strong, positive, and nurturing relationships to build healthier, more connected communities is at its core about harnessing the innate human capacity to care and love. Our work is ever relevant,

“In this season of giving gifts and giving thanks, I am grateful for the gift of Nurture Connection to the fields of health, early childhood, and family flourishing. With its new partnership with the Thrive Center at Georgetown and its deep connection to the voices of parents through the Family Network Collaborative, Nurture Connection is even more strongly positioned to advance Early Relational Health and support the healing and repair that this country needs right now. It is heartening to see the philanthropic community embracing strong, positive, and nurturing parent-child relationships as foundational to human development

and that's the North Star that must guide us at this moment and in the future."

-Jabeen Yusuf
Steering Committee Member

and a healthy democracy."
-Ira Hillman
Steering Committee Member

Reflecting Forward After the Election

As we process the outcome of this year's election, many of you might be reflecting — now or eventually — on how these changes will affect infants, toddlers, and their families, perhaps even your own. On our end, Nurture Connection's commitment to nurturing strong, positive relationships for every child remains steadfast.

As with any change, we hope everyone is creating environments rooted in love, connection, and support — just like you are for thousands of children and families.

As early childhood providers, practitioners, and parents, you do valuable work in your communities — work that matters. Through partnership building, new alliances, and the development of innovative solutions, we can and will meet the needs and challenges for today's families so that each and every child has the chance to thrive in a loving community.

We thank you for your courage and dedication to building supported and connected families and communities. Our collective mission continues on, and we remain humbled and excited about the possibilities of all that we can accomplish together.

With gratitude,

The Nurture Connection team

Advancing Early Relational Health Means Protecting Medicaid

As we move into a busy 2025 and the start of a new administration and legislative cycle, we're presented with a crucial time to educate grassroots, community, state, and federal leaders about the critical role that Medicaid plays for children, families, and members of every generation. Elisabeth Wright Burak explores the impact of Medicaid on advancing Early Relational Health, and what's at stake.



[Read more at this link](#)

Explore More



What is Early Relational Health?

[Early Relational Health](#) is the state of emotional well-



[*New webinar recording available!*](#)
[Introducing the IECMH Funding Compendium](#)

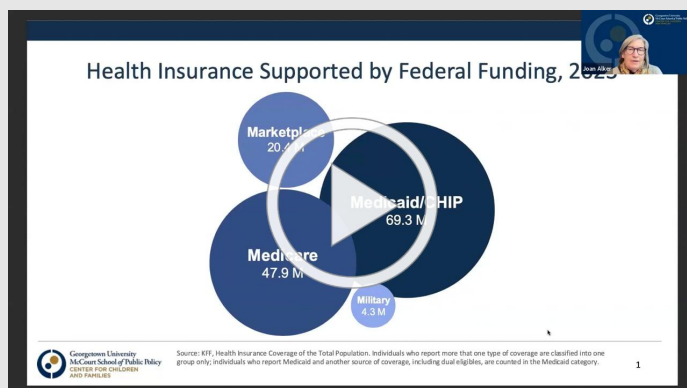
On Thursday, December 5th, 2024, the Office of Early Childhood Development (ECD) hosted a webinar overview of the IECMH activities and federal funding streams that can promote healthy social-emotional development, and prevent, identify, assess, or treat IECMH concerns.

Guest Speakers:

- Kenny Fassel, Public Health Advisor, SAMHSA, U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services
- Kathy Brown-Bragg, New Generations Director, Chris180, Atlanta, GA
- Misty Cole, Ohio Department of Children and Youth

This webinar follows the recently release of a new resource, the **[Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health \(IECMH\) Funding Compendium](#)** to support states, territories, Tribes, and local communities in making full use of existing federal resources to meet the mental health needs of young children and their families. This resource promotes building a strong foundation for mental health during the earliest, most critical years of a child’s life, and prevent and address emerging concerns.

Watch Here



[*New webinar recording available!*](#)
[How Medicaid Works and Threats it Faces in 2025](#)

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.

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](#)**.

On Tuesday, December 10th, 2024, the Georgetown University Center for Children and Families hosted a special session of their new Child Medicaid Policy Institute (CMPI). The Child Medicaid Policy Institute seeks to educate child health advocates, providers, stakeholders, and policymakers on the fundamentals of the Medicaid program and its importance for children, families, and other low-income individuals.

The webinar covered:

- An overview of current Medicaid financing
- Proposals to radically restructure Medicaid through a block grant or per capita cap as well as other proposals that shift substantial costs to states
- How these proposed changes would impact state budgets, people enrolled in Medicaid and health care providers and plans.

Speakers:

- [Edwin Park](#), Georgetown CCF Research Professor
- [Anne Dwyer](#), Georgetown CCF Associate Research Professor

Moderator:

- [Joan Alker](#), Georgetown CCF Executive Director

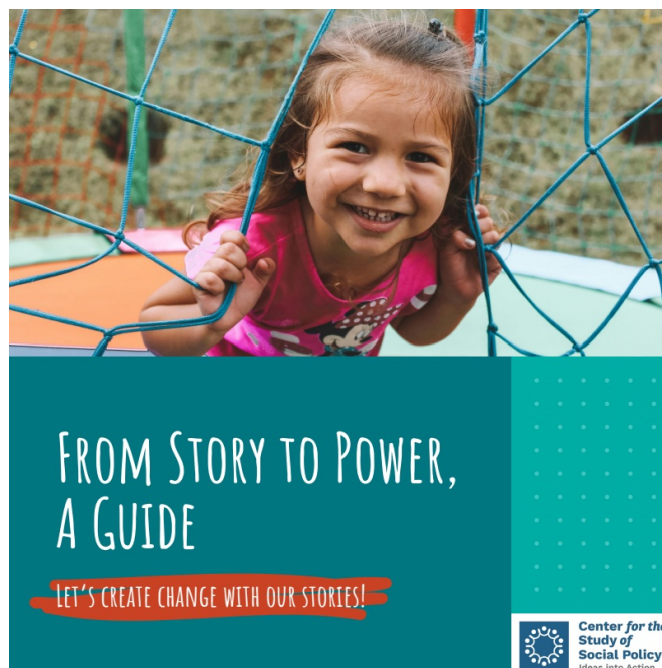
[Download the Presentation Slides](#)

[Download the Audio Transcript](#)

Additional information about legislative proposals and administrative actions that would impact Medicaid in 2025 is available [here](#).

Watch Here

What We're Reading



- From Story to Power, A Guide (2024, Center for the Study of Social Policy). Let's create change with our stories! This storytelling guide for parents and agencies partnering with

parent leaders will inspire parents, communities, and systems change with powerful storytelling. Co-designed by EC-LINC agency partners and PLN parent leaders, this guide was developed by Health+ Communications and is available in both [English](#) and [Spanish](#). [Read more here.](#)

- Holistic Approach to Early Relational Health: Cultivating Culture, Diversity, and Equity (2024), D. Charlot-Swillely, K. Thomas, C. F. Mondy, D. W. Willis and M.C. Condon. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health 2024 Vol. 21 Issue 5 Pages 563. DOI: 10.3390/ijerph21050563. [Read here.](#)
- Mother-child collaboration in an Indigenous community: Changing and enduring across generations (2024), B. Rogoff and I. Aceves-Azuara. Child Dev, Vol. 95, Issue 6, Pages 1858-1878. Accession Number: 39540594 PMCID: PMC11579644 DOI: 10.1111/cdev.14181. [Read here.](#)
- The first and next 1000 days: a continuum for child development in early life (2024), V. M. Aguayo and P. R. Britto. The Lancet, Vol. 404, Issue, 10467, Pages 2028-2030. DOI: 10.1016/S0140-6736(24)02439-5. [Read here.](#)
- The Paternal Brain Is Wired by Pregnancy (2024), H. Bottemanne and L. Joly. JAMA Psychiatry. DOI: 10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2024.3592. [Read here.](#)

If this newsletter was forwarded to you by a colleague and you would like to subscribe, click [here](#).

Contact

info@nurtureconnection.org



Nurture Connection | 2115 Wisconsin Ave NW | Washington, DC 20007 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!