



"I Am, Because We Are": Cultivating a Holistic Approach to Early Relational Health

Early Relational Health (ERH) research and practice illuminate how positive, strong, and nurturing relationships in the early years of life are foundational to flourishing and providing a protective buffer to the effects of life's many stresses. But what role does intercultural wisdom play in ERH? And how can Indigenous knowledge and cultural pathways transform and expand our collective understanding of ERH practices?

Dominique Charlot-Swiley, David Willis, and Marie-Celeste Condon explore these questions in their paper, "[A Holistic Approach to Early Relational Health: Cultivating Culture, Diversity, and Equity](#)," which they coauthored with Kandace Thomas and Christina Mondì. The paper appeared in the April 2024 issue of the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*.

Bringing the lived experiences of families and cultural and community wisdom into the field of ERH can be critical for practice transformation. The purpose of the paper, write the authors, "is to offer a synthesis of current knowledge about ERH in the United States; begin to integrate Indigenous and non-Indigenous research and knowledge about ERH in the hope that readers will embrace *Etuaptmumk*; and contribute to international dialogue about holistic infant-family ERH care." *Etuaptmumk* is [one of four Mi'kmaw guiding principles](#). It is a mutually respectful, relational way of being with one another, integrating different ways of seeing, understanding, and responding to situations and experiences for the benefit of all.

To discover the relevance of *Etuaptmumk* to ERH practice, policy, and research, the authors encourage non-Indigenous people to be fully present, listening to stories and experiences that shaped Indigenous ways of being in good relationship with one another. In that spirit, [during a recent conversation](#), Nurture Connection Founder and Director

David Willis, MD, asked his coauthors Dominique Charlot-Swilley, PhD, an assistant professor in the department of pediatrics at the Georgetown University School of Medicine, and Marie-Celeste Condon, PhD, an independent consultant and former researcher at the University of Washington, to please share their origin stories about their work in ERH.

[Read the Full Article Here!](#)



[Reflections from the 2025 Early Relational Health Funders Summit](#)

From the Carolinas to Texas to Alaska, speakers and participants at this year's Early Relational Health Funders Summit hosted by [Einhorn Collaborative](#) shared how early relational health shows up in communities with different cultural and historical contexts.

The Summit was designed to be a meeting ground where national and local funders can learn, collaborate, and do more together to ensure that children, families, and communities thrive and flourish.

Hear more [from Ira Hillman & Chi Nguyen](#) about this year's summit, and check out the [video recap](#)!

In honor of [Baby Sleep Day](#), our partners at Columbia University's COMBO Initiative share their research findings on sleep for short- and long-term infant development, as well as a key part of the conversation too-often overlooked: how infant sleep affects *parent* well being.

Being pregnant and adjusting to life with a new baby can be stressful and tiring (*especially* for families who had babies during



Happy World Doula Week!

Discover relational health stories and resources from the community-based doula movement:

the beginning of the pandemic). But COMBO's research has illuminated strategies that help new parents!

[Click here to read more](#) about what's at stake with sleep and stress levels, and what families can do for better sleep, energy levels, and resilience.



[Celebrating World Doula Week: Reflections On Black Maternal and Infant Health](#)

[Nurture Connection Presents: Recognizing the Power of Early Relational Health in the Community-based Doula Movement](#)

[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](#)

Nurture Connection Spotlight: ERH Parenting Journeys in Disability, Caregiving, & Special Health Needs

This March, Nurture Connection is honoring [Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month](#) and shining an Early Relational Health (ERH) spotlight on the unique journeys of parents and caregivers who care for children with significant health needs. The following is adapted from [an interview](#) the Nurture Connection editorial team conducted with Bryn Fortune (Coordinator, ERH Family Network Collaborative, and Nurture Connection Steering Committee Member) and Mia Halthon Jones (Parent Leader, ERH Family Network Collaborative, and Nurture Connection Steering Committee Member) about their personal experiences as parents of children with disabilities.



What would each of you tell a parent who may be just starting out on this journey?

Bryn: Well, I might tell them because they're at the beginning of the journey — change the order with whoever they're encountering in these formal spaces, all those professionals. Instruct them to “Ask me how I am, ask me how my family is, and you listen to me. *That's* what I most need from you. *That's* the best service you can offer me.” Because it opens up a space for someone to then be a real person. Just because professionals feel pressured with limited time (rightfully so), don't let that block the opportunity to build a relationship so you can have faith in all the “transactional” information you want them to share so you can learn.

Mia: Remember that you are an individual outside of what you may be dealing with with your child. Your best is always enough. The love for your child will carry you through.

My daughter's biggest superpower is her sense of humor. She can go into a room and make everybody laugh. The journey was so much but also worth it. I wouldn't change anything.

[Read the Rest of Their Conversation Here!](#)

Explore More



What is Early Relational Health?

[Early Relational Health](#) is the state of emotional well-being that grows from emotional connection between babies and toddlers

***Webinar* How Medicaid Supports Early Intervention for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities and Developmental Delays**

Join [Georgetown University Center for Children and Families](#), [IDEA INFANT AND TODDLER COORDINATORS ASSOCIATION](#) and [ZERO TO THREE](#) on **April 2nd at 2PM ET**: "How Medicaid Supports Early Intervention for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities and Developmental Delays."

Why it matters: Medicaid is a key source of funding for IDEA Part C Early Intervention programs in most states. Early intervention services help reduce developmental delays by helping young children develop and improve their social-emotional skills, knowledge, and behaviors before entering the K-12 system. By assisting infants and toddlers in their primary stages of development, early intervention minimizes long-term costs and lessens the prevalence of severe disabilities as adults.

What we will discuss: This webinar will provide an overview on the ways IDEA Part C early intervention and Medicaid work together to support infants and toddlers with disabilities in states. Panelists will also discuss what proposed federal Medicaid cuts could mean for early intervention programs and young children who need Part C services. Speakers will include the parent of a child receiving early intervention services and experts in the fields of early childhood, Medicaid, and IDEA Part C.

You can also read more in [this policy brief!](#)

Register Here



***Webinar Recording* Love to Learn: The Transformative Power of Care and Connection in Early Education**

On March 4th, 2025, [The Campaign for Grade-](#)

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](#). 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](#).

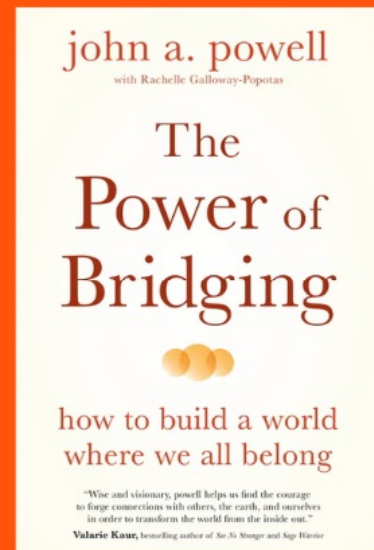
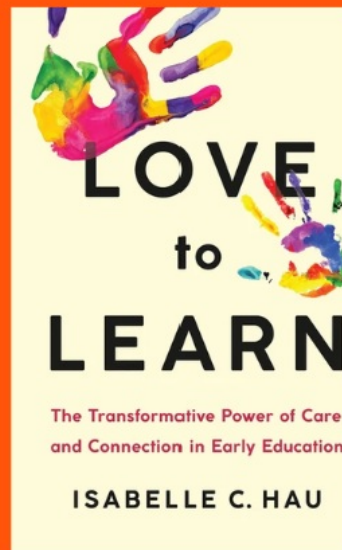
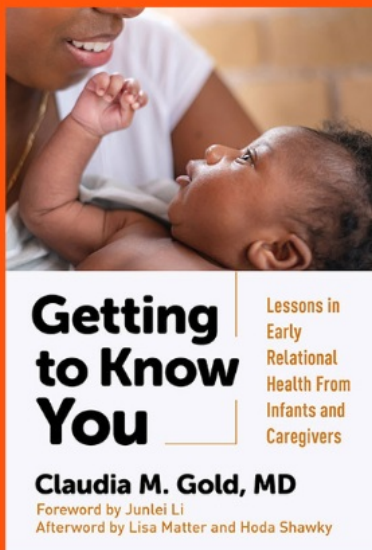
[Level Reading](#) hosted an invite-only webinar featuring Isabelle Hau, the author of *Love to Learn: The Transformative Power of Care and Connection in Early Education* and moderated by Meera Mani, Ed.D., of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

Commentators also included Gloria Corral, PIQE; Kali Thorne Ladd, Children's Institute; and David W. Willis, MD, FAAP, Nurture Connection.

Watch Here

What We're Reading

- Getting to Know You: Lessons in Early Relational Health from Infants and Caregivers by Claudia Gold (Teachers College Press, March 2025). ISBN 9780807786536. [Read here.](#)
- Love to Learn: The Transformative Power of Care and Connection in Early Education by Isabelle C. Hau. (PublicAffairs, February 2025). ISBN 9781541703773. [Read here.](#)
- The Power of Bridging: How to Build a World Where We All Belong by John A. Powell (Sounds True, 2024), ISBN 9781649631657. [Read here.](#)



- “VID-KIDS” Video-Feedback Interaction Guidance for Depressed Mothers and Their Infants: Results of a Randomized Controlled Trial, P. D. Tryphonopoulos, D. McNeil, M. Oxford, C.-L. Dennis, J. Novick, A. J. Deane, et al. Behavioral Sciences 2025 Vol. 15 Issue 3 Pages 279. DOI: 10.3390/bs15030279. [Read here.](#)
- Adverse childhood experiences in firstborns and mental health risk and health-care use in siblings: a population-based birth cohort study of half a million children in England, S. Syed, L. D. Howe, R. E. Lacey, J. Deighton, M. Qummer Ul Arfeen, G. Feder, et al. The Lancet Public Health 2025 Vol. 10 Issue 2 Pages e111-e123. DOI: 10.1016/s2468-2667(24)00301-3. [Read here.](#)
- Social contexts and black families’ engagement in early childhood programs, J. Leer, I. Z. Smith, Z. Hill and L. A. Gennetian. PLOS ONE 2025 Vol. 20 Issue 1 Pages e0316680. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0316680. [Read here.](#)
- The continuity relationship makes caring for women with anxiety and depression easier,

but it is also a heavy responsibility, A. Cummins, T. Eaves, E. Newnham, S. Melov, C. Hilsabeck, K. Baird, et al. Women and Birth 2025 Vol. 38 Issue 2 Pages 101886. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wombi.2025.101886>. [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!