



ERH In Action: How a Relational Health Focus Can Drive Practice Transformation

The first chapter of Dr. Darcy Lowell's remarkable story of practice transformation is about recognizing the problem. In the 1990s, in Bridgeport, Connecticut, where Dr. Lowell worked as a developmental and behavioral pediatrician at Bridgeport Hospital, she noticed that young children and families were not receiving critically needed mental and relational health services. This was impacting their health and well-being. What could be done?

She convened a task force of like-minded health, education, and social services providers, and out of those many cross-sector meetings came the impetus for **Child First**, an intensive, two-generation intervention helping the most vulnerable young children and their families that Dr. Lowell founded as a home-visiting program in 2001.

Since then, Child First has been **recognized** by the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS); the National Registry for Effective Programs and Practices (NREPP) of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA); and the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy as one of only a handful of organizations that provide evidence-based mental health interventions for young children and their families.

"I really believe that Early Relational Health is the most important work we can do," says Dr. Lowell. This belief — this vision — is what sustains Child First in its practice transformation efforts. Discover Child First's relational approach to interventions, and how a foundation rooted in Early Relational Health (ERH) continues to guide growth and sustainability.

[Read More About Dr. Lowell's Journey Here](#)

Nurturing Parent Mental Health Through ERH

*This May, Nurture Connection is honoring Mental Health Awareness Month and creating space to reflect on how Early Relational Health (ERH) can help support the mental health needs of parents and families. The following is adapted from an interview the Nurture Connection editorial team conducted with **Tish Macinnis** (Parent Leader, ERH Family Network Collaborative; Strengthening Families, Southern Families, Alabama) and **Claudia Aristy** (Parent Leader, ERH Family Network Collaborative; Reach Out and Read, Latinx-Speaking Immigrant Families, New York).*



How do you see the connection between the promotion of ERH and the mental health and well-being of parents?

Claudia: It's paramount — how can one happen without the other!

Tish: They can't be separated. A mother or a father or a caregiver has got to be able to know how to take care of themselves in order to be able to take care of their child.

Claudia: It's not even only knowing how to do it, but do you even have the capacity to do it? How can you actually be emotionally in tune with your child, when you're not even emotionally in tune with yourself? . . . It's almost impossible to be able to think about that, if these families are going to be able to nurture that child when they're not nurturing themselves, or society is not nurturing them.

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

Nurture Connection Presents:
The Power of Codesign in Research - June 11, 2025

The Power of Codesign in Research

How Parent Partnership Supports Practice Transformation



Nikki Shearman

Chief of Strategic Initiatives,
Reach Out and Read



**Dani Dumitriu,
MD, PhD**

Associate Professor of Pediatrics
and Director, Center for Early
Relational Health, Columbia
University



Desarae Smalls

Parent Leader,
City Hospital of
Philadelphia (CHOP)



Nicole Loveless

Parent Leader, Family
Network Collaborative
(FNC)



**David W. Willis,
MD, FAAP**

Founder and Director,
Nurture Connection

Join Nurture Connection on Wednesday, June 11th, 2025 from 2:00pm to 3:30pm EST / 11:00am to 12:30pm PST for a conversation about the power of codesign, and how parent partnership supports practice transformation in early childhood ecosystems.

Attendees will learn how researchers, practitioners, and parents worked together to develop Reach Out and Read's recent Parent/Caregiver-Clinician Relationship Survey, a validated assessment tool for assessing the parent-clinician relationship during routine pediatric primary care.

From empathy interview questions co-designed with parent leaders to thematic analysis and feedback using the Delphi method, engaging families in the research design process offers a relational foundation for implementation research, and can further the impact of ERH promotion efforts through pediatric primary care.

Guest Speakers:

- Nikki Shearman, PhD, Chief of Strategic Initiatives, Reach Out and Read
- Dani Dumitriu, MD, PhD, Associate Professor of Pediatrics and Director, Center for Early Relational Health, Columbia University
- Desarae Smalls, Parent Leader, CHOP

Co-hosted by:

- Nicole Loveless, Parent Leader, Family Network Collaborative (FNC)
- David W. Willis, MD, FAAP, Founder and Director, Nurture Connection

[Register Here](#)

Explore More



**What is Early
Relational Health?**

Hello, from the 2025 National WIC Conference!



***Webinar Recording* Facilitating Fatherhood within Early Relational Health (ERH): Changing the Narrative in Early Childhood Systems and Supports**

On Thursday, April 24th, 2025, Nurture Connection founder David Willis and Jose Romo Ramirez (Washington State Department of Health) presented at the 2025 NWA Annual Education & Training Conference in Las Vegas, NV. A recording and slides from their Advocacy & Policy Session are now available [at this link!](#)

Watch Here



The Fifth Annual HOPE Summit Shaping the Future: A Framework for Every Sector, June 3rd & 4th, 2025 [virtual]

This year's HOPE summit now offers sector-specific tracks with workshops and sessions tailored to healthcare, education, child welfare, substance misuse prevention, and the HOPE Impact. Each track will feature expert speakers, interactive discussions, and networking opportunities with like-minded professionals who share your interests and challenges. The summit's focus is on the HOPE framework, providing you with practical, evidence-based tools and strategies that are specifically

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.

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](#).

tailored to your sector, so you can leave with actionable insights to drive real impact in your work. No matter what sector you work in, the 2025 HOPE Summit will provide you with the tools you need to create positive change in your work with children and families.

[Register Here](#)

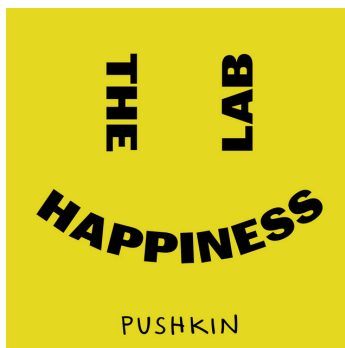
What We're Listening To . . .



Relational Health and Thriving (with Dr. David Willis)

Thrive Dispatches, April 29, 2025 • 41 mins

On this episode of Thrive Dispatches, Dr. Matt Biel speaks with Dr. David Willis, founder of the Nurture Connection Network. David brings a unique perspective shaped by his experiences as a developmental and behavioral pediatrician, academic scholar, and leader of federal policy in early childhood. The discussion explores the evolution of pediatric care beyond individual treatment toward a more holistic understanding of children within their relational ecosystems—families, neighborhoods, schools, and communities. [Listen Here](#)



Reducing the Stress of Parenting with Dr. Vivek Murthy

The Happiness Lab, April 30, 2025 • 34 mins

Too many parents feel “exhausted, burned out, and perpetually behind” according to the former US Surgeon General Dr Vivek Murthy. He says more needs to be done to protect parental mental health. Vivek talks to Dr. Laurie Santos about his experience as a dad and the loneliness, guilt and shame parents can feel as they struggle with the challenges of raising children. [Listen Here](#)

What We're Reading

- **Experiences of material hardship have ripple effects on young children’s development.** Liu, Sihong & Raikes, Abbie, RAPID Survey Project, Stanford University (April 22, 2025). [Read here.](#)
- **Posttraumatic stress in infancy: The roles of cumulative trauma and caregiving context.** Chu, A. T., Bond, M. H., Rogowski, B., Leba, N. V., Ghosh Ippen, C., Cirolia, A., & Lieberman, A. F. (2025). *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1002/imhj.70015>. [Read here.](#)
- **One state's journey with a reflective supervision professional development**

series: Development, implementation, and adaptation. Silver, R.B., Low, C.M., Huffhines, L., Newland, R., Herman, R. & Parade, S.H., Infant Mental Health J. 2025. DOI: 10.1002/imhj.22165. [Read here.](#)

- **The unique role of community-based para-professionals delivering early childhood development in low-resource contexts: a Delphi study.** Pearson, E.C. & Opoku, M., BMC Health Services Research, 2025, Issue 1. DOI: 10.1186/s12913-025-12297-5. [Read here.](#)
- **Randomized Trial of a Generative AI Chatbot for Mental Health Treatment.** Heinz, M.V., Mackin, D.M., Trudeau, B.M., Bhattacharya, S., Wang, Y., Banta, H.A., Jewett, A.D., Salzhauer, A.J., Griffin, T.Z. & Jacobson, N.C. NEJM AI. 2025. Issue 4. DOI: 10.1056/aioa2400802. [Read here.](#)

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