

# Connections Matter

Early Relational  
Health Newsletter



## ERH in 2026: Building a Future of Collective Flourishing

The transformational power of Early Relational Health (ERH) is its multiplier effect in building healthy, flourishing communities. The development of ERH in infants and children cannot be separated from the broader health of families and communities. In fact, the concept of ERH recognizes that children's flourishing reflects a collective commitment of families, communities, and society.

As Claudia Aristy, Parent Leader, Nurture Connection Family Network Collaborative (FNC) notes, "One of the things that I have really, really enjoyed seeing and witnessing in my everyday work is the healing power that Early Relational Health has on everybody that is involved. . . . That's how population health happens."

And so, as we enter 2026, we are optimistic that we will continue to build on what we accomplished in 2025. When we reflect on the past year, three meaningful themes emerge from the work [that may offer direction in 2026](#): 1) advancing new ways of understanding ERH across the early childhood ecosystem; 2) learning and leading with parents; and 3) transforming systems and communities by centering connection.



"You don't have to be a medical doctor at all to do this work. . . . You can just be a person working to help one parent at a time, one child at a time, to change their community — and their world."

As we move further into 2026, we encourage you to continue listening and learning deeply from each other, and embracing an abundance mindset of cultural perspectives and community wisdom. Together, we can approach the work of systems transformation with collective flourishing in mind — centered on values of openness and curiosity as well as empathy, positivity [and even joy](#).

[Read More Here](#)



### [Nurturing Early Relational Health with Small Moments Big Impact](#)



Early Relational Health (ERH) is promoted through everyday moments between parents/caregivers and their babies and toddlers. These moments include routine interactions such as feeding, dressing, and diaper changes as well as reading, singing, playing, and a parent and child simply spending time together.

Nurture Connection has identified the [Small Moments Big Impacts \(SMBI\) video series](#) as a unique and valuable resource for early childhood practitioners and ERH advocates to share and discuss with families, to make a special connection for the promotion of ERH. Developed by Barry Zuckerman, MD, and Cyndie Hatcher, MD, this series shows what Early Relational Health really looks like and means in action, and offers opportunities for all frontline providers to have meaningful conversations about ways parents/caregivers can develop their understanding and change their behavior to build ERH within their own families.

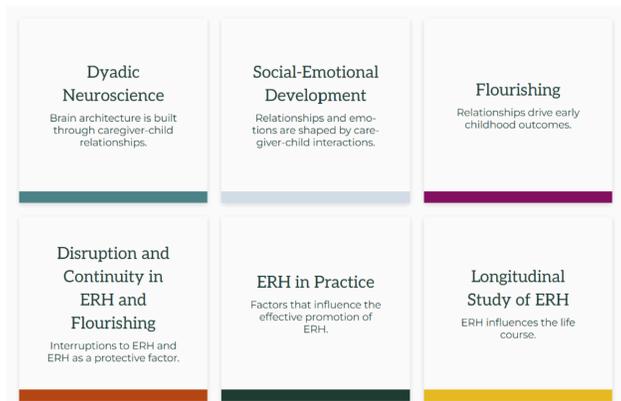
With the help of parent leaders from our Nurture Connection [Family Network Collaborative](#), we identified the following SMBI videos that exemplify and embody Early Relational Health in action. Each video includes reflection questions for parents and caregivers, which can help spark important conversations and build a special relationship between providers and parents.

***"When we talk about connection and being a parent, everyone talks about how beautiful and wonderful it is . . . but this is work, especially if you're a single mom. [In this video] she's by herself and depends on her mom's support and wisdom to guide her. The ending is encouraging — being a parent does get better."***

—Parent Leader, Nurture Connection  
Family Network Collaborative

[Click here](#) to hear more from our parent leaders about what resonated for them in each of these SMBI videos!

## \*New Resource\* Introducing Our ERH Science Page



With support from the Burke Foundation, Nurture Connection is excited to feature the core science and concepts behind ERH on our website – which now showcases established evidence and understanding of how children and families thrive. The [ERH Science page](#) highlights six core concepts that inform the foundation of ERH science, which include:

- **Dyadic neuroscience** - Brain architecture is built through caregiver-child relationships.
- **Social-emotional development** - Relationships and emotions are shaped by caregiver-child interactions.
- **Flourishing** - Relationships drive early childhood outcomes.
- **Disruption and Continuity in ERH and Flourishing** - Interruptions to ERH and ERH as a protective factor.
- **ERH in Practice** - Factors that influence the effective promotion of ERH.
- **Longitudinal Study of ERH** - ERH influences the life course.

ERH science is able to embed a holistic relational health frame in early childhood programs, policies, and systems by joining the vast body of childhood development research with emerging practice-based methodologies grounded in cultural anthropology, family wisdom, and generational knowledge.

This curation of early childhood development and dyadic flourishing core concepts — including neurodevelopment, infant and early childhood mental health, and science of learning — as understood and informed by the network's practice and research leaders will help make the science of ERH more visible and accessible for early childhood systems, practitioners, and advocates. Discover more [at this link](#).

[Learn More About ERH Science](#)

## Explore More



### [Where Joy Lives on Fridays: Celebrating ERH in Action with UCSF Bloom](#)

What if the most powerful intervention we could offer our families wasn't a prescription, but a relationship? Nurture Connection Steering Committee member, Dr. Dayna Long, MD, FAAP, paints a true vision of health, wellbeing, flourishing, and joy in her work at UCSF BLOOM, a clinical primary care program rooted in ERH that serves children ages 0–5 and their families with the understanding that healing, growth, and resilience begin in relationship.

[Read More Here](#)



## [The Sankofa Infant Mental Health History Project](#)

Join the Indigo Cultural Center for their premiere of the Sankofa Infant Mental Health History Project, an unveiling of a multi-year and ongoing love letter to the Infant Mental Health (IMH) field. "Part One: Land, Root, Seed, Culture, Community" features five storytellers from the IMH field, along with the Sankofa Project Steering Collective. There are four screening dates/times to choose from, and each screening will include lively and reflective conversation that encourages viewers to reach back -- together -- to retrieve cultural, community, and indigenous wisdom that still holds truths for the infant mental health field. [Register Here](#)



## [Voices from the 2025 National Summit: Reach Out & Read Podcast](#)

From exam rooms to entire communities, ERH is transforming how we support families. In this Reach Out and Read Podcast episode from our 2025 National Summit, hear from Dr. David W. Willis, MD alongside parents, clinicians, funders, and advocates from communities nationwide, as they share their hopes and strategies for brightening our shared tomorrow. [Listen Here](#)



CENTER FOR EARLY  
RELATIONAL HEALTH

## [Announcing a Strengths-Based Bonding Screen: A Major Step Toward Supporting Mother-Baby Health in the U.S.](#)

The Center for Early Relational Health has adapted an exciting tool for measuring mother-baby bonding in America: the [Revised Postpartum Bonding Questionnaire \(PBQ-R\)](#). This marks a significant step toward making screeners less burdensome for doctors and researchers, and more intuitive for patients and research participants, with significant potential to build more robust usage in clinical care. [Learn More Here](#)

## What We're Reading . . .

- "Early Relational Health and its Impact on the Developing Brain: A Scoping Review." Zhang, L., Lontos, D., Olsson, C.A. et al. *Clin Child Fam Psychol Rev* (2025). DOI: 10.1007/s10567-025-00545-3. [Read here.](#)
- "Development of a revised and abbreviated version of the postpartum bonding questionnaire (PBQ-R): First U.S. validation and association to child outcomes." Lavallée, A., Warmingham, J. M., Reimers, M. A., Curtin, P., Kyle, M. H., Austin, J., Lee, S., Barker, T., Hussain, M., Arduin, E., Ahmed, I., Atwood, G., Ettinger, S., Smotrich, G., Turner, J. B., Fisher, P. W., Marsh, R., & Dumitriu, D. (2026). *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 47, e70052. DOI: 10.1002/imhj.70052. [Read here.](#)
- *We Were Once a Family: A Story of Love, Death, and Child Removal in America.* Asgarian, R. (2023). Picador. ISBN 9781250321923. [Read here.](#)
- *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness.* Haidt, J. (2024). Penguin Press. ISBN 9780593655030. [Read here.](#)
- "Child health prioritization in national adaptation policies on climate change: a policy document analysis across 160 countries." Zangerl, K., et al. (2024). *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, Vol. 8, Issue 7, 532-544. DOI: 10.1016/S2352-4642(24)00084-1. [Read here.](#)
- "Five strategies to build children's agency and resilience in responding to climate change." Torres, A., & Moore, K.A. (2024). *Child Trends*. DOI: 10.56417/5364j8842a. [Read here.](#)
- "A World Fit for the Next Seven Generations: Upholding Indigenous Rights for the Foundation of a Sustainable Future." Park, J., Wilcox, K., Ineese-Nash, N. (2023). *Canadian Journal of Children's Rights / Revue canadienne des droits des enfants* 10, 5–29. DOI: 10.22215/cjcr.v10i2.4483. [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.

### Core ERH Resources:

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. [Early Relational Health: Building Foundations for Child, Family, and Community Well-Being](#). Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. 2025.

Willis D, Bethell, C. [Child Flourishing: A Critical Indicator for Early Relational Health](#). Nurture Connection. 2024.

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.

Frameworks Institute. [Building Relationships: Framing Early Relational Health](#). May 2020.

Learn more about the [science of ERH](#) and find additional resources on our [website](#).



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