

Connections Matter

Early Relational
Health Newsletter



ERH in Action: Inside Illinois' Early Intervention Training Program

During the Advancing Comprehensive Early Childhood Intervention Conference in Lisbon, Portugal, September 2–5, professor and founder and director of Nurture Connection David W. Willis, MD, FAACP, attended what he called “a glorious presentation” about Illinois’ Early Intervention Training Program (EITP), which supports professionals working with families with children from birth to three years old. Back in the States, Dr. Willis, who is a professor of pediatrics and psychiatry at Georgetown University, sat down with two other Nurture Connection leaders for a virtual meeting with the presenter and EITP director, Susan Connor, to learn more about it and how its leaders have incorporated the principles of Early Relational Health.

In this issue, we feature the Early Intervention Training Program (EITP) in Urbana-Champaign, Illinois, a professional development program that supports providers across the Illinois Early Intervention System. Like programs in all 50 states and territories, Illinois Early Intervention accepts referrals from many sources, including families, physicians, childcare providers, and social services and early learning programs. Illinois emphasizes family-centered practices, and it has the added benefit of offering a cutting-edge early intervention training program based on respect for family strengths and wisdom and grounded in the importance of relationships.

“Early intervention programs support strong relationships between caregivers and young children, and serve as an extraordinary opportunity for the promotion of Early Relational Health (ERH).

“We have been fortunate in Illinois in that the leaders and pioneers in our state have been advancing this work for years, which has positioned our early intervention system well to embrace ERH.”

—Susan Connor, Ed M, Director & Principal Investigator,
Early Intervention Training Program at the University of Illinois



[Read the Story Here](#)



**[A Parent Leadership Path with Deep Purpose:
Colleen Andrews Reflects on Supporting Children
and Families with Special Healthcare Needs](#)**

Nurture Connection is honored to welcome Colleen Andrews to our Family Network Collaborative (FNC)!

Colleen is a parent leader who currently represents children and families with special healthcare needs. Located in Wasilla, Alaska, she hopes to eventually represent families across the state. Right now her focus is on the Mat-Su Valley, where she lives and works closely with the community as a project manager for [R.O.C.K. Mat-Su \(Raising Our Children with Kindness\)](#), a cross-sector collaborative of community members designed to promote family resilience and decrease child maltreatment in Alaska's Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

This March, which is [Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month](#), Colleen shares some reflections about the important role that Early Relational Health (ERH) plays in supporting children with special healthcare needs and their families.

“Being a mother to a child with special medical needs is a unique and powerful experience. It’s not an easy path, but it’s one that brings deep purpose. I believe parents carry wisdom that deserves to be heard, and I’m honored to bring that perspective to this work and create a sense of belonging for families.”



**—Colleen Andrews, Parent Leader
Nurture Connection Family Network Collaborative (FNC)**

[Read on](#) to learn more about Colleen and her journey to championing ERH as a parent leader.

[Read More](#)

Registration Now Open! **Perinatal and Infant Mental Health Conference**

Together, Now: Reimagining Perinatal & Infant Mental Health Through a Two-Generational Lens

 **June 5, 2026**
 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. EST
Virtual



When: Friday, June 5, 2026, 10:00am-6:00pm
Where: Virtual (via Zoom)

The fourth annual [Perinatal and Infant Mental Health Conference](#) brings together leaders, clinicians, researchers, educators, trainees, policy makers, and advocates, individuals with lived experiences and community partners working across perinatal and infant mental health to foster meaningful connection, shared learning, and collective action. At its core, the conference is designed to bring people into the same room, across disciplines and sectors, to start conversations, break down silos, and promote deeper integration and collaboration in how we support families during the perinatal and early childhood period.

The conference is organized around five interconnected areas essential to advancing perinatal and infant mental health: clinical services, research, training and education, community engagement and lived experiences, and policy and advocacy. Through a keynote address, panels, and interactive discussions, the conference highlights innovative work and

diverse perspectives across each of these domains, while emphasizing the importance of cohesive and intentional multidisciplinary efforts.

[Register Here](#)

Explore More



[Birth Experience Helps Shape the Mom-Baby Relationship, with Potential Lifelong Implications for Both \(CERH\)](#)

A new study from the Center for Early Relational Health (CERH) shows that birth experience can shape the beginnings of the relationship between a parent and their new baby—and potentially influence lifelong outcomes for both. "This study shows, through scientific data, that birth is not just a medical experience; it's also an emotional experience" says Dr. Jennifer Warmingham — "and that's an important step toward understanding how we can better support the transition to parenthood through practice and policy." [Read More Here](#)



[In Case You Missed It: Celebrating Parent Leadership and Joy at Nurture Connection](#)

Last month, we celebrated three years of Nurture Connection – and honored the critical advocacy role that parent leaders play in advancing early relational health (ERH) by connecting directly with families and communities. Read more about the amazing work of the Nurture Connection Family Network Collaborative (FNC), and how this framework of parent-led partnership continues to help us keep family voices at the forefront. [Read More Here](#)



[Virtual Training Opportunities with Hospital-to-Home \(Northwest Center KIDS\)](#)

Launched in 2022 by Early Intervention providers at Northwest Center, the Hospital-to-Home Systems Change program helps ensure that every family leaving the NICU has the support that they need to thrive. Upcoming virtual training series include Project ECHO (a free community of practice around perinatal mental health) as well as an online interdisciplinary 3-day training series for providers of all disciplines working with infants and families in the NICU to home transition. [Learn More & Register Here](#)

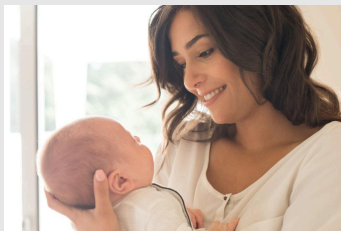


[*Early Childhood Funding Opportunity*](#) [Applications Now Open for the Build Award](#) [\(The Promise Fund\)](#)

The Promise Fund supports early childhood innovators reimagining what's possible for children and families through community-rooted solutions. The Build Award by Promise Venture Studio provides \$200,000 in unrestricted funding and a 12-month partnership to help high potential, early-stage and proximate-led early childhood organizations. Preliminary application opens **March 2nd to April 10th, 2026**. [Learn More Here](#)

What We're Reading . . .

- *Born to Flourish: How New Science and Ancient Wisdom Reveal a Simple Path to Thriving*. Davidson, Randy and Cortland Dahl (Simon & Schuster, March 24, 2026). ISBN 9781668066232. [Read here.](#)
- "Labour and delivery characteristics, maternal birth satisfaction and early relational health among COVID-19 pandemic-born children." Warmingham, J. M., Lavallée, A., Lanoff, M., Russo, J., Atwood, G., Owen, J., ... Dumitriu, D. (2026). *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, 1–17. doi:10.1080/02646838.2026.2631181. [Read here.](#)
- "A Living Scoping Review of Universal Interventions for Promoting Relational Health in Childhood, Adolescence and Young Adulthood." Allen J, Homel R, McLaws S, Evans-Whipp T, Olsson CA; PRF Early Relational Health Network. *Clin Child Fam Psychol Rev*. 2026 Jan 30. doi: 10.1007/s10567-025-00553-3. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 41615630. [Read here.](#)
- "Welcome to the Era of Relational Intelligence." Hau, Isabelle C. *Stanford Social Innovation Review* 24, no. 2 (2026): 26–35. doi:10.48558/PY66-AH68. [Read here.](#)



What is Early Relational Health?

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

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.

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.

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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