

What is
**Early
Relational
Health?**

Module 1



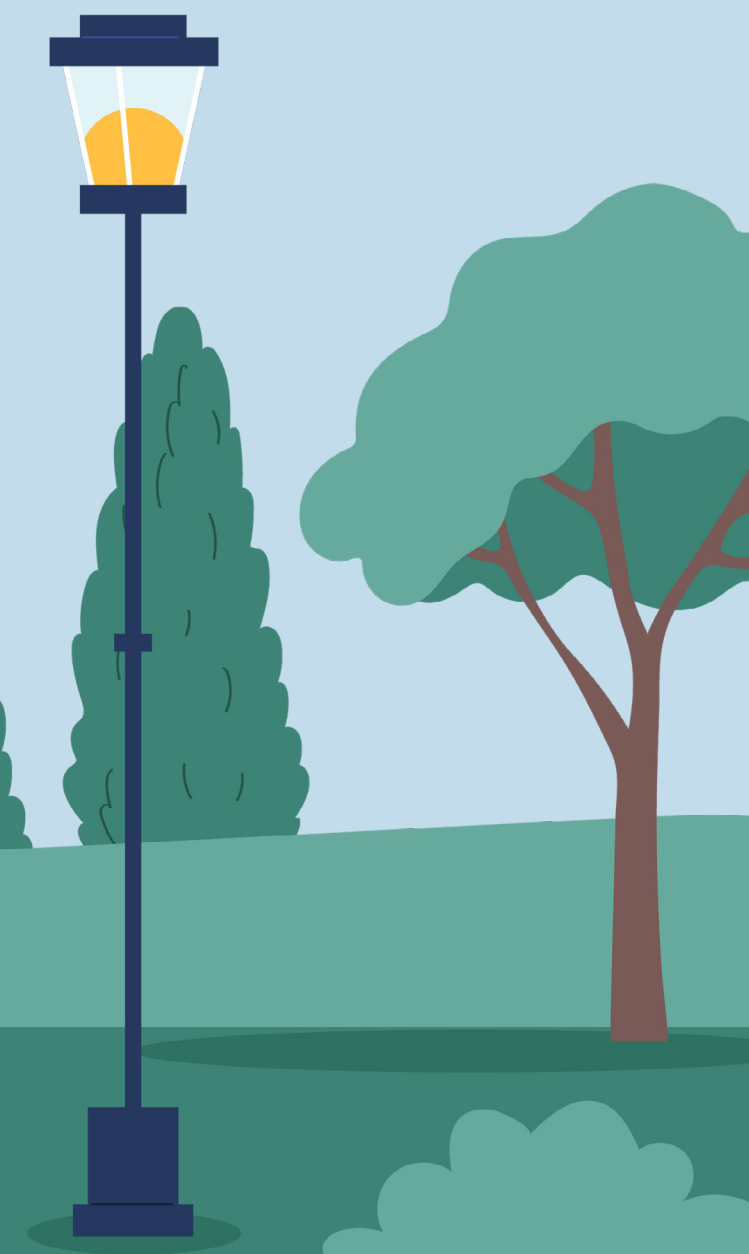
The Heart of Early Relational Health.





This series is for families with young children, birth to three, and the providers that support and partner in their care such as infant and early childhood mental health consultants, home visitors, doulas, health care providers and early childhood teachers.

The purpose of this series is to empower you with practical tools, insights, and strategies to nurture healthy relationships in the care of your child or in the support of others caring for children.

This series will cover

- **Module One** What is early relational health?
- **Module Two** What are the core values associated with early relational health?
- **Module Three** How to support early relational health through family and provider partnerships.



Each module provides new ideas to think about **(KNOW)**, 
time to visualize the ideas in action **(SEE)**, 
a space to think and wonder about what has been experienced **(REFLECT)**, 
and ideas for what you can put into practice right away **(TAKE ACTION)** 



Putting Principles into Action: Building an Early
Relational Health Ecosystem

What is Early Relational Health

This module relates to four of the
foundational principles of the early
relational health paradigm:



Nurturing caregiver-child interactions establish strong, meaningful, enduring, consistent relationships and provide immediate and long-term benefits for both young children and their caregivers.



Simple and everyday human interactions are
“good enough” early relational experiences.



Connectedness, belonging, and mattering are essential for parents.

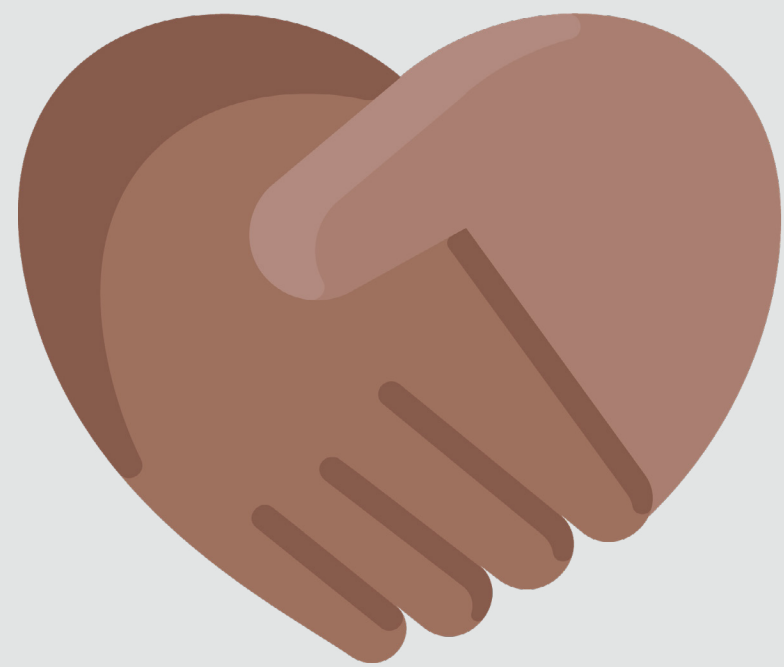




A broad range of helping professionals and community members can provide experiences which promote early relational health.



KNOW



Early Relational health is the state of emotional well-being that grows from an emotional connection between babies, toddlers, and their parents and caregivers when they experience strong, positive, and nurturing relationships with each other.

The foundational relationships that babies and toddlers experience with all their caregivers in the first years of life provide the stability and supports necessary for the health, development, and wellbeing of children and the adults that care for them.

When we focus on this foundation and support these relationships, children and their caregivers thrive—now and into the future.

DEVELOPMENT

HEALTH

WELL-BEING

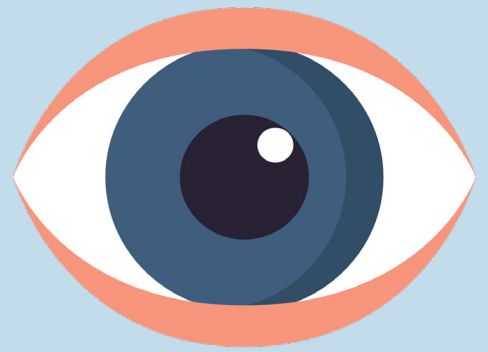
RELATIONSHIPS

Early relationships grow within everyday moments of connection such as diapering, feeding, and telling stories.

Noticing and celebrating these back-and-forth interactions gives parents and providers an opportunity to support strong relationships.



SEE



REFLECT

Let's take time now to reflect on what we learned in the **KNOW** section and what we saw in the video.

How does the idea of early relational health resonate with you? How have you experienced it in your own life?



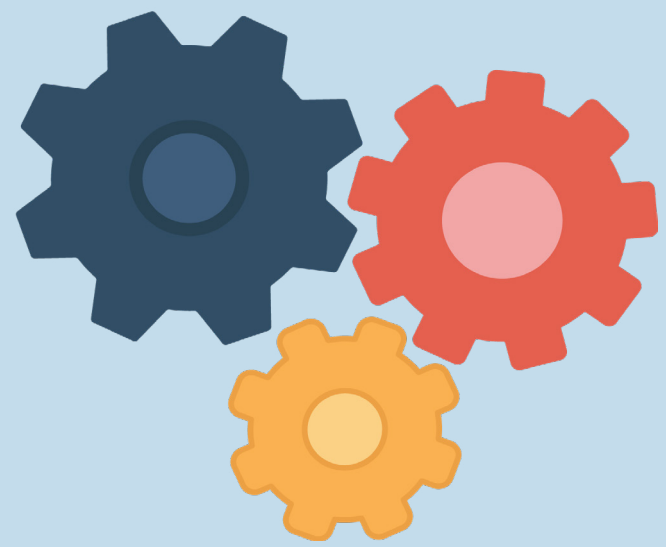
Providers

1. How comfortable do you feel talking about early relational health with families?
2. Have you ever wondered about the magic taking place in a parent child interaction that you have witnessed?

Parents

1. What are some of the everyday connections that you have with your child(ren) that bring you both joy or a sense of appreciation and love? How does this connection impact you?
2. Have you ever wondered about the magic taking place for your child during these everyday connections?

TAKE ACTION for Parents



Notice and Reflect on Your Connection.

Observe your child’s reactions during everyday interactions, like when you smile, speak, or comfort them. Talk about the feelings of these moments: “I see how your face lights up when we play together—I love sharing time with you!”

Name Emotions and Responses.

Pay attention to your child's emotions and talk about them: "I can see you're feeling frustrated right now. I am here for you." This helps them feel understood and strengthens your connection. It can be helpful to name your own emotions, too - for your own self-regulation and for your child to observe and learn these skills.

loved

afraid

frustrated

sad

happy

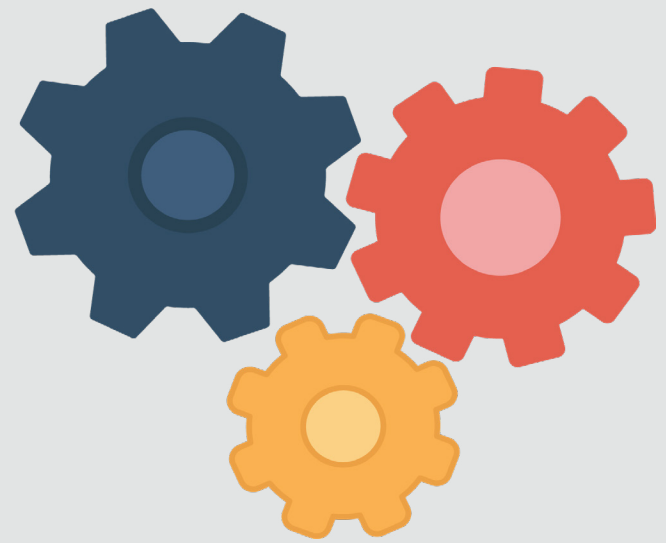
Take a moment to notice your emotions during interactions with your child, both the positive and the challenging.

For example, ask yourself, "How does it feel when my child smiles at me or reaches for me? How does my own mood or other circumstances affect how I respond to them?" Recognizing the joy, pride, or even challenges you feel can help you understand how your relationship with your child impacts your well-being and connection.



TAKE ACTION

for Providers



Take Action by noticing and talking about early relational health. How can you do this?

There are many ways.



Observe and Celebrate Connections.

Pay attention to small moments of bonding, like smiles, eye contact, or shared laughter. Acknowledge these moments by saying, “I see the shared smile between you, that moment says so much about the bond you’re building.”





Highlight Emotional Cues.

Notice and name a child's emotions during interactions: "You are feeling like a big sister by helping out in the kitchen!" This helps caregivers recognize and respond to their child's feelings.

Encourage Responsive Care.

Reinforce the importance of responding to a child's needs:
"When you comfort them so quickly, you're showing them they can trust you."





For more information and to continue learning about Early Relational Health, you can find information at

NurtureConnection.org

and the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Tab on the MI Department of Health and Human Services Website

michiganiecmhc.org

Citations

- Harper Browne, C., Li, J., O'Connor, C., Russo, J. E., & Willis, D.W. (2024). Putting Principles into Action: Building an Early Relational Health Ecosystem. Center for the Study of Social Policy and Nurture Connection
- FrameWorks Institute. (2020). Building relationships: Framing early relational health. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute
- Nurture Connection nurtureconnection.org
- Putting Principles into Action: Building an Early Relational Health



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