

Connections Matter

Early Relational
Health Newsletter



[ERH in Action: Keeping Early Relationships in Mind with New Jersey's Early Relational Health Initiatives](#)

Support for the emotional health of babies and children is fueled by a wealth of sources, from foundations and community groups to crusading legislators and investigative reports. There are also pivotal moments that redefine our thinking about Early Relational Health (ERH) and what is possible.

New Jersey is a key example: The state's funding for early relationships initially came in response to Superstorm Sandy, a devastating 2012 tropical cyclone that destroyed nearly 350,000 homes in New Jersey and caused \$30 billion dollars in damages, leaving nearly 40,000 residents unable to return to their homes for months. But the superstorm also underscored the importance of relationships — and the opportunity for more social supports.

The disaster funds that eventually rebuilt New Jersey also gave birth to an innovative state outreach initiative for infant and child health, culminating in a historic victory earlier this year when early childhood advocates in the Garden State celebrated the passage of landmark legislation to improve access to preventive behavioral health services for children.

Read [more reflections](#) on New Jersey's ERH initiatives from Kaitlin Mulcahy, PhD, LPC, IMH-E, who along with her colleagues has taken a leading role in promoting strong, reciprocal

bonds between infants and young children and the people who care for them.

“We start with safety first — and how as humans we find safety through relationships.”

*—Kaitlin Mulcahy, PhD, LPC, IMH-E
Director, Center for Autism and Early Childhood Mental Health, Montclair State University*

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“The Connection Is Hard to Beat”: Nurture Connection’s Family Network Collaborative Reflects on Its First In-Person Meeting

Nurture Connection has long centered parent partnership as a key equity strategy through the Family Collaborative Network. The FNC’s approach is novel: seven parent leaders who connect with families from underrepresented communities to elevate the voices and wisdom of parents and caregivers in the promotion of Early Relational Health (ERH).

Earlier this May, [the FNC met in Detroit](#) for two days of group reflection, connection, and sharing. This gathering also marked the first opportunity for the FNC Parent Leader team to come together in person — including members who had been there since the beginning, as well as the two new members who recently joined the group.

The power of storytelling and relationships was central to the gathering, where FNC members had the opportunity to practice sharing their individual journeys into parent

leadership, and reflect together on the importance of building community voice and partnering with families to advance ERH.

[Read More Here](#)

“We were able to connect at a deep and very personal level — and reflect on where we are and where we’re going.”

—Claudia Aristy, Nurture Connection Family Network Collaborative Parent Leader; New York

New Recording Research Transformation Through Parent Codesign

The image is a promotional graphic for a webinar recording. At the top, it says 'Presented by: Nurture Connection'. Below that, it lists the 'DATE' as 'Tuesday, June 9th' and the 'TIME' as '2:00-3:30 PM ET'. The main title is 'Research Transformation Through Parent Codesign' with a subtitle 'How Parent Partnership is Shaping Our Research Methods, Results, and Interpretation'. A large play button icon is overlaid on the center. At the bottom, there are five circular headshots of the panelists with their names and titles: Tiffany Solomon (Parent Leader, Reach Out and Read, Panelist), Deepa Srinivasavaradan (Parent Leader, Panelist), Steven Thibert (Parent Leader, Nurture Connection Family Network Collaborative (FNC), Panelist), Andréane Lavallée, PhD (Associate Research Scientist, Center for Early Relational Health, Columbia University, Panelist), and David W. Willis, MD, FAAP (Founder & Director, Nurture Connection, Moderator).

On Tuesday, June 9th, 2026 in partnership with researchers from the Columbia Center for Early Relational Health (CERH), Nurture Connection hosted a dynamic conversation about an exciting new large-scale [co-designed study](#) and its preliminary findings on how parents view early relational health, followed by a panel Q&A with Parent Leaders from Reach Out and Read and the Nurture Connection Family Network Collaborative, who were involved in the study’s codesign process. Collaborations like this are a key step in generating the research needed to transform universal pediatric care, to better support children, families, and communities.

Access the recording, slides, and additional resources from this webinar [at this link](#).

[Explore Additional Resources](#)

Happy Father's Day (6/21)!

This June, we are celebrating fatherhood and shining a spotlight on the [National Fatherhood Directory](#), a centralized, accessible resource that Father's Uplift is building to highlight organizations, programs, and spaces where fathers can engage in care and connection, both virtually and locally.

Their goal is simple: to ensure that no father is without access to support, regardless of where he lives. Participation is free, whether you are running formal programs or simply creating meaningful spaces for fathers.

[Learn more here](#), and submit organizations for the Directory via [this short form](#).



Explore additional reflections on fatherhood & ERH this month:

- [Fathers are Fathers – and So Much More](#) by Thelma Ramirez, EdM
- [Do Fathers Need to Have Paternal Instincts?](#) by Junlei Li, PhD
- [Empowering Fatherhood Through ERH](#) with Steven Thibert

Explore More



New Resources!

HRSA NOFOs:
HRSA-26-104 (TPEC) & HRSA-26-057 (ECCS SEED)

 Nurture Connection

New Resource! HRSA NOFOs: HRSA-26-104 & HRSA-26-057

Nurture Connection has compiled Early Relational Health (ERH) resources to support state and tribal entities in developing their applications for HRSA's NOFOs for [HRSA-26-104](#) and [HRSA-26-057](#). Both of these funding opportunities aim to support and strengthen early childhood systems of care across the country.

HRSA-26-104 (TPEC) resources - [download here](#)
HRSA-26-057 (ECCS SEED) resources - [download here](#)

Current closing date for applications: July 10, 2026.
Electronically submitted applications must be submitted no later than 11:59 p.m., ET, on the listed application due date.

[Wired for Connection \(PBS\)](#)



This new documentary from PBS explores the loneliness epidemic that threatens our very survival, and the shifts we can all make to leverage social connection for collective well-being. The film highlights science from our partners at the Center for Early Relational Health on the critical early relationships between babies and their caregivers. [Watch it here.](#)

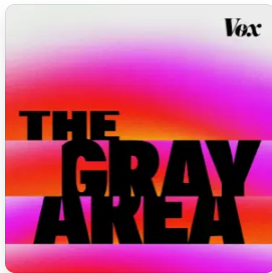
[Learning from Parents How to Co-Design Family Research \(CERH\)](#)

What can we learn about early relationships by listening deeply to families? Discover reflections and findings from a study co-designed with Parent Leaders from Reach Out and Read and the Nurture Connection Family Network Collaborative, aimed at deeply understanding parents' firsthand experiences of their relationships with their children. [Read More](#).



[Expanding Access Through Collaboration: Georgetown Program Connects Community Innovators With Mental Health Research and Resources](#)

From virtual treatment programs for justice-involved teens to AI-powered tools helping overwhelmed new parents, community-driven mental health organizations gathered for a solutions fair hosted by the Innovation Hub at the Thrive Center for Children, Families, and Communities. Innovation Hub fellows showcased solutions designed to support children and families through early childhood development, including expanding access to mental healthcare and disability services. [Read More](#).



[In Defense of Fatherhood \(The Gray Area Podcast\)](#)

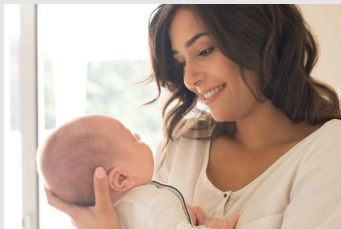
Everyone says having kids changes your life. That's true. But it's not the whole story. In this episode, Sean Illing talks with author Derek Thompson about fatherhood, how raising kids can shock you, and why parenting feels not so much "hard" as "nonstop." They explore the psychology of loving something more than yourself, the loss of control over your own time, and the bittersweet realization that every moment with your child is already slipping away. Also: why two kids is not just twice the work, and why you might still want to get on the ride anyway. [Listen Here](#)

What We're Reading . . .

- "A Parent-Generated Framework of Early Connection: Findings from a CBPR Qualitative Study." Katrina Fuller, Sophia Duby, Diana More, Maeve Winter, Marissa Lanoff, Nicole Loveless, Jeannette Mejias, Desarae Smalls, Tiffany Solomon, Deepa Srinivasavaradan, Steven Thibert, Carly Vargas, Nikki Shearman, Dani Dumitriu, Andreane Lavallee. PREPRINT available at medRxiv

[Read here.](#)

- "Strengthening early relational health: strategies and system-level considerations for pediatric primary care." Behrens S and Salley B (2026). *Front. Pediatr.* 14:1773528. doi: 10.3389/fped.2026.1773528. [Read here.](#)
- "A Scoping Review of Australian Aboriginal Early Relational Health Knowledge Systems." McNear, S., Chamberlain, C., Priest, N. *et al. Clin Child Fam Psychol Rev* 29, 256–275 (2026). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-026-00570-w>. [Read here.](#)
- "The effects of the Rx Kids unconditional cash prescription programme during pregnancy and infancy on birth outcomes in the USA: a population-based, quasi-experimental study." Sumit Agarwal, H Luke Shaefer, Yasamean Zamani-Hank, Eric Finegood, Jenny LaChance, Mona Hanna. *The Lancet Public Health*, Volume 11, Issue 6, 2026, Pages e355-e363, ISSN 2468-2667, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(26\)00055-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(26)00055-1). [Read here.](#)
- "Two-brain perspective on family dynamics; Complementarity in mother-child and father-child interbrain synchrony." Ruth Feldman, Linoy Schwartz, Carmel Shilo *et al.* 29 April 2026, PREPRINT (Version 1) available at Research Square, <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-9335839/v1>. [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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