

Connections Matter

Early Relational
Health Newsletter



“Exploring the Gaps in Early Relational Health Research”

*An Investigation into the Science of Early Relationships
from the Center for Early Relational Health
at Columbia University*

As a **field catalyst** promoting Early Relational Health (ERH), Nurture Connection focuses on six core concepts that form the foundation of **ERH science**, including dyadic (two-way) neuroscience; social-emotional development; flourishing; disruption and continuity in ERH and flourishing; ERH in practice; and longitudinal studies of ERH (those that follow a person or group of people over time).

This article is the first in our **“ERH Research in Action” series**, which dives deeper into emerging research and work within the early childhood field that explores how ERH science can deepen our understanding of relational health — and help us transform systems and policies to better support the flourishing of children, families, and communities.

Dani Dumitriu, MD, PhD, and Andréane Lavallée, PhD, have worked with thousands of young families, Dumitriu as a pediatrician in the newborn medicine unit and Lavallée as a nurse in the neonatal intensive care unit. This clinical expertise played a crucial role in their current work leading research on the science of early relationships between caregivers and children: how they form, how they grow, and how they support positive future outcomes.

The two scientists helped lead [a gold-standard systematic review of existing research](#) on Early Relational Health (ERH), which points to positive effects on ERH from dyadic interventions, while underlining the timeliness of dyadic and longitudinal studies going forward.

Recently, Dumitriu and Lavallée sat down with Harvard researcher and parenting expert Junlei Li, PhD, to answer questions about this essential science and what it might mean for families. [Read more of their conversation here.](#)

“A lot of the work that we’re doing at the Center for Early Relational Health is to tease apart what we’re calling ‘the taxonomy of early relational constructs’ . . . things like bonding, maternal sensitivity, and attachment.

“We’re really in the infancy of this work . . . ”

—Dani Dumitriu, MD, PhD
Principal Investigator, the DOOR Lab;
Director, Center for Early Relational Health (CERH)
at Columbia University

[Read More Here](#)



Reflecting Forward: Strengthening Relational Connections with "Early Relational Health Together"

As a field catalyst for Early Relational Health (ERH), Nurture Connection is excited to share this free animated video learning series, developed in partnership with Michigan's Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation ([IECMHC](#)).

The learning series — ["Early Relational Health Together"](#) — was co-designed with parent leaders and families to elevate the importance of simple but effective practices and interactions that support healthy relationships between babies, toddlers, and their caregivers.

This relational approach of listening deeply and partnering with families to co-develop resources that resonate with parents, caregivers, and providers across a range of spaces and care settings is what makes the "ERH Together" learning series so special. By creating more shared understanding and connection across systems, together we can support the kinds of reflective conversations and everyday interactions that are needed to help nurture ERH — and the flourishing of children, families, and communities.

[Explore the ERH Together Learning Series](#)

[ERH Together: Learning Series Overview](#)

[Module 1: What Is Early Relational Health?](#)

[Module 2: What Are the Core Values of Early Relational Health?](#)

[Module 3: "We're On The Same Team"](#)

Mary Mackrain (consultant with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services) spearheaded the development of this series. Nurture Connection Family Network Collaborative (FNC) parent leaders Steven Thibert and Mia Halthon Jones, along with Regine Cherry (FNC parent) and Bryn Fortune (Nurture Connection Ambassador for Parent Partnership), participated in the parent codesign process.

[Read on](#) to hear more reflections from Mary on the series' development and hopes for how families and providers can use this learning series.

[Reflecting Forward with Mary Mackrain](#)

"At its heart, this series is really an invitation for all of us to slow down and recognize the power of relationships and the importance of showing up for one another in human ways."

— Mary Mackrain, PhD, IMH-E® (IV)



Join Us on June 9th! Research Transformation Through Parent Codesign

Join Us!



Research Transformation Through Parent Codesign

How Parent Partnership Is Shaping Our Research Methods, Results, and Interpretation

Presented by:



DATE

Tuesday, June 9th

TIME

2:00-3:30 PM ET



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



David W. Willis, MD, FAAP

Founder & Director, Nurture Connection, Moderator

Join Nurture Connection on **Tuesday, June 9th, 2026** from **2:00 - 3:30 pm ET** for an exciting conversation about the power of codesign to transform Early Relational Health (ERH) research.

Nurture Connection believes that partnering with parents can help uncover new and vital ways of understanding early childhood relationships.

That's why we're committed to lifting up the work of our scientific partners — Reach Out and Read & the Center for Early Relational Health — who are doing things differently: by innovating ways to engage parents as co-designers in research and implementation.

The future of ERH science is partnership between researchers and the families and communities they serve. This collaboration is a key step in generating the research needed

to transform universal pediatric care, to better support children, families, and communities.

**Research Transformation Through Parent Codesign:
How Parent Partnership Is Shaping Our
Research Methods, Results, and Interpretation**

**When: Tuesday, June 9th, 2026 | Virtual (via Zoom)
2:00 pm - 3:30 pm ET | 11:00 - 12:30pm PST (90 minutes)**

Attendees will hear 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.

Join us for a dynamic conversation between parent leaders Tiffany Solomon, Deepa Srinivasavaradan, and Steven Thibert; and Andréane Lavallée, PhD (Lead Scientist at the Center for Early Relational Health's Interpersonal Synchrony and Connection (InSync) lab, Columbia University.); moderated by David W. Willis, MD, FAAP, (Founder & Director, Nurture Connection).

[Register Here](#)

Explore More

American Academy of Pediatrics
ADVOCATE TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN

FAN: Relational Practice Through Attunement and Self-Reflection
PediaLink Live Learning Event
May 27, 2026 3pm CT

1 CME Credit Available

Webinar Goals

- Increase knowledge and application of the Facilitating Attuned Interactions (FAN) model, attuned communication, reflective practice, and strategies for mindful self-regulation and self-compassion.
- Improve performance by fostering awareness and supporting the consistent integration of these strategies into clinical practice.

Guest Experts

 <p>Linda Gilkerson, PhD, LISW Professor, Founder and Executive Director, Evan B. Kimiaka FAN Network</p>	 <p>David W. Willis, MD, FAAP Professor of Pediatrics and Psychiatry at Georgetown University</p>
 <p>David O'Banion, MD, FAAP Associate Professor of Pediatrics at Emory University</p>	 <p>Sarah Eastburg, LCSW, IRCMH-C Physician L&M Program Manager/Trainer</p>

Live Learning Event with AAP & Erikson Institute on Attunement in Pediatric Care (May 27th)

You're invited to join an interactive live learning event on **Wednesday, May 27th, 2026 at 3pm CT** that introduces the Facilitating Attuned Interactions (FAN) model and its application in pediatric care. Participants will gain a foundational understanding of the FAN model, the role of attunement in fostering relational health, and strategies to support both family engagement and provider well-being. This session also highlights alignment with AAP's Relational Health and Mental Health Competencies policy statements, and situates this work within the broader learning experience offered through the full PediaLink course FAN: Relational Practice Through Attunement and Self-Reflection. [Register Here.](#)



Child Care as a Barrier to Medical Care: A Level-Setting Conversation (June 4th)

Parents are forgoing medical and dental appointments because they cannot bring their children with them and cannot arrange alternative care. This issue has significant consequences for families, yet it remains largely absent from policy conversations. Join Capita on **Thursday, June 4, 2026, from 2:00–3:30 PM ET** for a virtual event to illuminate how child care prevents access to medical care. [Register Here](#)



[*New Resource!* Early Literacy Toolkit \(AAP\)](#)

This new toolkit from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) provides evidence-based guidance and resources to promote early literacy in clinical settings and communities. It includes information for pediatric professionals as well as information for families. [Explore Here](#)



CENTER FOR EARLY
RELATIONAL HEALTH

[Patient-provider Relationship Is a Key Factor in Shaping Perinatal Quality of Care, With Downstream Effects on Both Mom and Baby \(CERH\)](#)

A new study from the Center for Early Relational Health's Marissa Lanof, MA, shows that perceived quality of perinatal care shapes mothers' healthcare experiences, with potential lifelong impacts on families. [Read More](#).

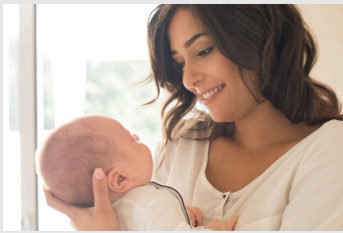


[The Case for Thinking Like a Child \(The Gray Area Podcast\)](#)

Sean Illing talks with psychologist Alison Gopnik about how children think, learn, experience the world, and why their minds may be more powerful than ours in some crucial ways. They explore the idea that kids are the “research and development” wing of the human species, built for exploration, curiosity, and discovery, while adults are optimized for focus, efficiency, and getting things done. Along the way, they discuss why children notice things we've stopped seeing, what we lose when we grow up, and what parenting reveals about love, care, and the nature of intelligence itself. [Listen Here](#)

What We're Reading . . .

- "Population Approaches to Promoting Relational Health from Early Life." Zubrick, S.R., Evans-Whipp, T. & Olsson, C.A., *et al. Clin Child Fam Psychol Rev* (2026). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-026-00566-6>. [Read here.](#)
- Promoting human flourishing. *Nat Hum Behav* 9, 827–828 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-025-02213-6>. [Read here.](#)
- *FAN: Relational Practice Through Attunement and Self-Reflection*. American Academy of Pediatrics (April 17, 2026). Course ID 62484. [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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