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Maryland Philanthropy Network
ERH Series

Growing Together: Building Early Relational Health for Stronger Families and Communities



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THE POWER OF HUMAN CONNECTIONS:

"Its all about the relationships"



Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World

Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy, MD, 2020

“Social connection stands out as a largely unrecognized and underappreciated force for addressing many of the critical problems we’re dealing with, both as individuals and as a society”

Early Relational Health (ERH)

Not a new concept, but a new term

ERH builds upon decades of research from the fields of:

Child development
Infant mental health
Neurodevelopment





Early Relational Health: Definition

And, by definition, **ERH** is the state of emotional well-being that grows from the positive emotional connection between babies and toddlers and their parent/caregivers supported by strong, positive and nurturing experiences.

And **ERH** shapes the well-being of both the child and the caregiver, the two-way nature of relationships.



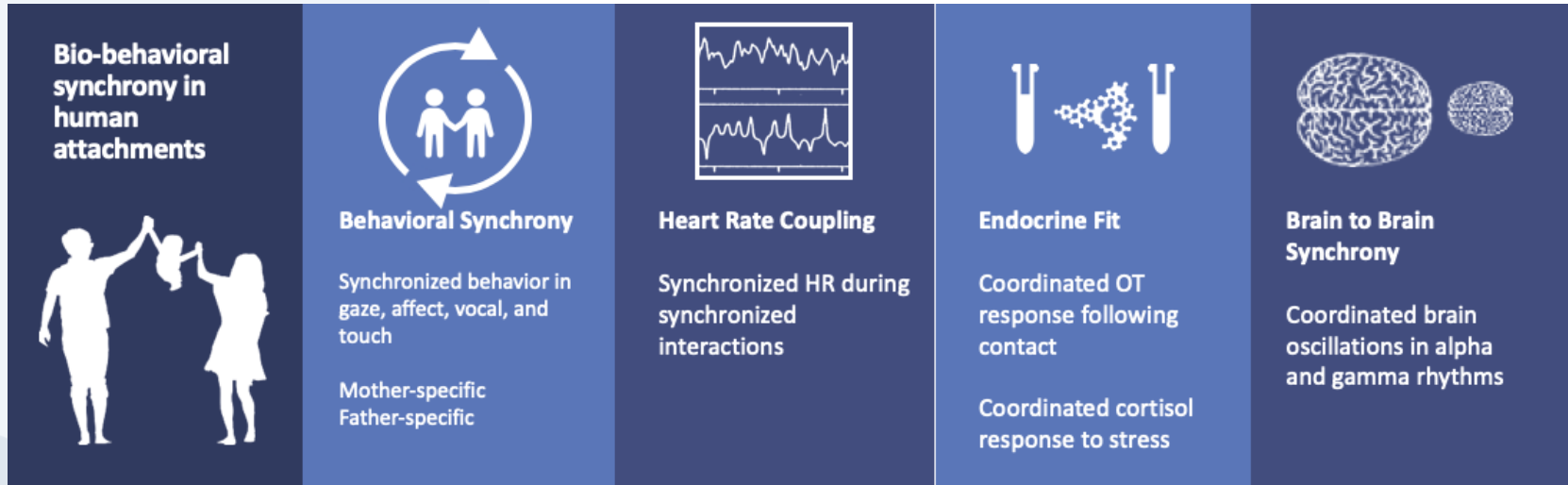
Relational Observations

Relational Health Milestones

- Shared interest in each other
- Engagement w/ each other
- Shared emotions between them
- Shared initiation to create interactions w/ each other
- Imitation of each other
- Use of symbols/gestures to communicate to each other
- Communicate ideas non-verbally



Bio-behavioral synchrony and dyadic neurodevelopment





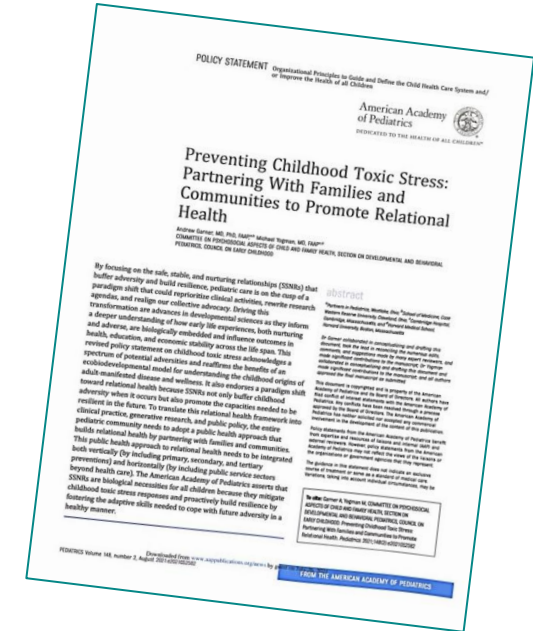
And social-emotional development is an outcome of early relational health

And early learning is built on the foundations of early relational health

2021 AAP Policy Statement

Preventing Childhood Toxic Stress: Partnering with Families and Communities to Promote Relational Health

“By focusing on the safe, stable, and nurturing relationships (SSNRs) that buffer adversity and build resilience, pediatric care is on the cusp of a paradigm shift that could reprioritize clinical activities rewrite research agendas and realign our collective advocacy.”



Population Health

- **Flourishing:** National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) reports only 30% of children meet all four criteria of flourishing. Nearly one quarter of children are not flourishing.¹
- **Mental Health:** One in six U.S. children aged 2-8 years (17.4%) have a diagnosed mental, behavioral or developmental disorder.²
- **School readiness:** In 2022, only 63.6% of 3- to 5-year-old children were 'On Track' in 4-5 domains without needing support in any domain. **(NSCH, Healthy and Ready to Learn)**

¹ Bethell CD, Gombojav N, Whitaker RC. Family Resilience And Connection Promote Flourishing Among US Children, Even Amid Adversity. *Health Affairs*. 2019/05/01 2019;38(5):729-737. doi:10.1377/hlthaff.2018.05425

² The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community. Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation (2023). Retrieved from: <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>

³ National Survey of Children's Health: School Readiness, 2022. Data Brief (2023). Available at: <https://mchb.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/mchb/data-research/2023-nsch-hrtl-brief-oct-2023.pdf>

National Survey of Children's Health, 6 months-5 years

Four Components of the Child Flourishing Index:



Affectionate
and tender
with parent

ENGAGED and
LOVING



Bounces back
quickly when
things don't go
their way

EMOTIONAL
REGULATION



Shows interest
and curiosity
in learning
new things

CONFIDENT



Smiles and
laugh a lot

POSITIVE
AFFECT



National Survey of Children's Health, 6 months-5 years

Six Components of the Family Resilience and Connection Index:

Family Resilience and Connection Index (FRCI)

- Family works together to solve problems (vs. ignoring problems)
- Know they have strengths to draw on
- Stay hopeful even in difficult times
- Share ideas and talk about things that really matter
- Family reaches out and talks with each other when they face problems

- Parent coping well with parenting (parent stress)

The Flourishing Paradigm

- Family resilience and connection, early relational health (caregiver-child connection) and positive childhood experiences (PCEs) promote flourishing, even amid high adversity
- Child flourishing strongly predicts:
 - social-emotional wellbeing
 - school readiness and engagement, and
 - positive mental health



National Survey of Children's Health

Prevalence of Mental, Emotional and/or Behavioral Health Problems

WHAT ARE KEY DRIVERS THAT DISRUPT FLOURISHING?



Relational health risks

- Adverse childhood experiences (ACE's)
- Low parental mental health
- Low parental social supports
- High caregiver aggravation

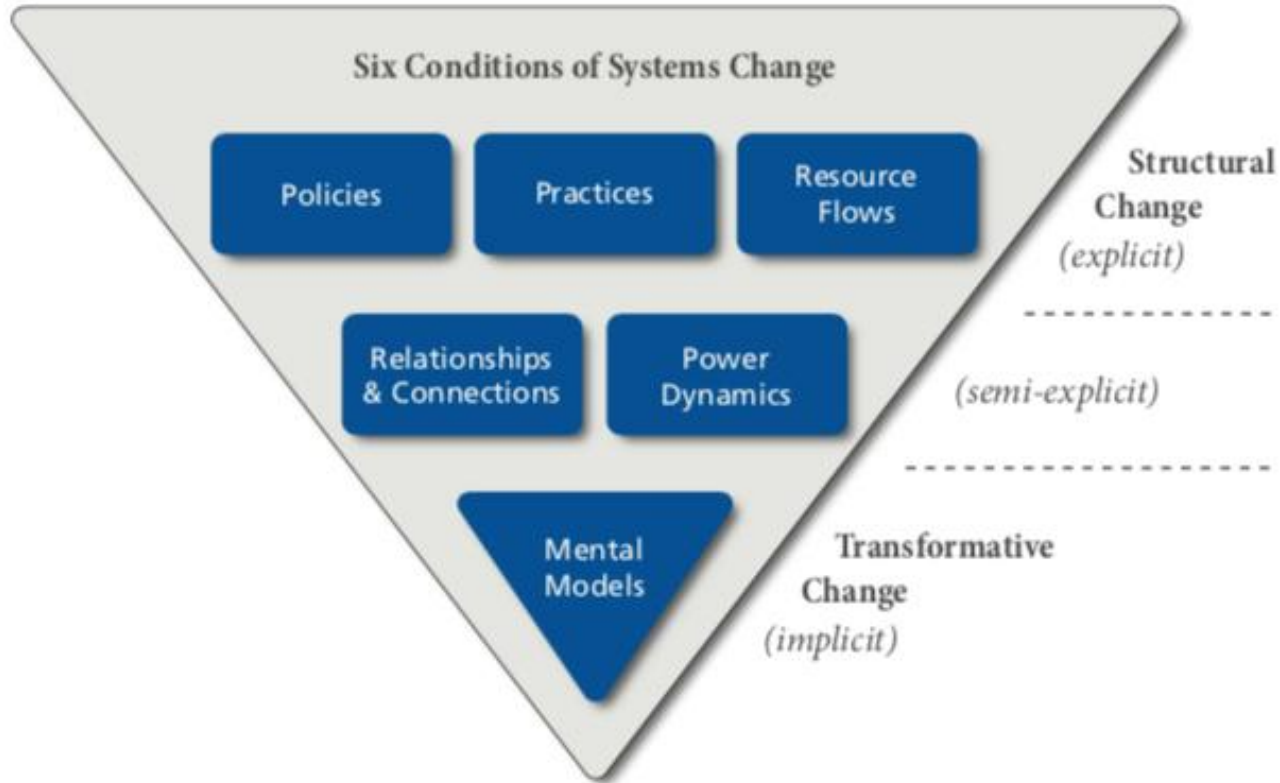
Social Health Risks

- Economic Hardship
- Food Insecurity
- Exposure to community violence
- Racism

Elements of a Comprehensive Early Childhood Development System



Six Conditions of System Change



Pediatric Health Care:

Promoting Early Childhood Development and Early Relational Health: Shovel ready elements

- **Promotion and Engagement**
 - **Reach Out and Read (ROR)**
 - Well-visit planner / Cycle of Engagement
- **Models to strengthen family support and child development**
 - Healthy Steps
 - DULCE
 - Video Interaction Project (VIP)
- **Relational care coordination**
 - Community health workers
 - Family specialists
 - Early child development experts*
- **Screening and Measurement**
 - SWYC, PEARLS, PRAPARE, etc.
 - ASQ / ASQ-SE, PEDS, etc.
 - Parental depression screening
 - Early Relational Health Promotion Tool

Bundle for Advanced, Team-based, High Performing Medical Homes for Young Children

Redesigned Well-Child Visits

- Holistic, **team-based care**
- Comprehensive **well-child visits** based on Bright Futures guidelines and EPSDT
- Family-centered, **strengths-based, relational**, holistic approaches
- **Recommended screening** for development, social-emotional health, maternal depression and social determinants of health (SDOH)
- Reach Out and Read as universal promotion

Relational Care Coordination

- **Routine** care coordination as part of medical home
- **Intensive care coordination** for more complex medical conditions or social risks
- **Relational care coordination staff** (e.g., community health workers, peer navigators)
- More **effective responses, completed referrals, and linkages** to community

Other Services and Enhanced Supports

- **Co-located programs in primary care** to promote ERH and development (e.g., DULCE, Healthy Steps, VIP)
- **Integrate mental health**
- **Families engaged** as advisors and partners
- **Referrals and/or linkages** to other services (e.g., home visiting, early intervention, dental care, early care and education, parent-child mental health therapy, nutrition programs)

Adapted from: Johnson K, Bruner C. *A Sourcebook on Medicaid's Role in Early Childhood: Advancing high performing medical homes and improving lifelong health*. Child and Family Policy Center. 2018. https://www.inckmarks.org/docs/pdfs_for_Medicaid_and_EPSDT_page/SourcebookMEDICAIDYOUNGCHILDRENALL.pdf
Willis DW, Paradis N, Johnson K. The paradigm shift to early relational health: A network movement. *Zero to Three*. 2022;42(4):22-30.



The Relational Health Workforce

Relational care coordinators
Family development specialists
Family service workers
Community health workers
Home visitors
Family coaches
Promotores
Doulas
Family navigators

Connection as a Social Determinant of Health

Research repeatedly demonstrates that social connection strongly influences health. Feeling connected to a community was one of the strengths identified in the community engagement data from this assessment.

“The work of creating health is the work of creating connection.”
- DIDI PERSHOUSE

Nurture Connection Advances ERH

Nurture Connection's Mission:

In partnership with families and communities, Nurture Connection is building a networked and engaged movement to promote Early Relational Health for every family and in every community

Nurture Connection's North Star

Every family, caregiver and child flourishes within the community's relational ecosystem led by family-community partnerships and culturally-aligned practices, policies and agreements

Core Principles of Early Relational Health

- **Nurturing Relationships:** Attentive, responsive, and reciprocal interactions build strong and lasting relationships, benefiting both children and caregivers in the short and long term.
- **Incorporating Family and Culture:** Family experiences and cultural wisdom are essential in shaping early childhood development and strengthening research and practice.
- **Connectedness and Belonging:** The well-being of parents is supported by a sense of connectedness, belonging, and mattering, which directly influences early relational health.
- **Strength-Based and Inclusive Approach:** Emphasizing the strengths and diversity of families, practices, and communities fosters a comprehensive and equitable environment for development.
- **Collaborative and Community Efforts:** Shared decision-making between families, professionals, and community members enhances early relational health and ensures all children and families can thrive.

Reach Out and Read Advances ERH





Promoting Early Relational Health through
Reach Out and Read
Claudia Aristy, Director,
Children of Bellevue's Reach Out and Read Program
Bellevue Hospital, NY

Reach
Out
& Read®





Who are We?

- First ROR in NYC, more than 30 years of experience.
- One of the first research studies done on ROR happened here.
- Helped kick off the ROR GNY coalition over 20 years ago.
- One of two ROR programs nationwide to expand and include a prenatal educational intervention.



How early to start? From the womb...

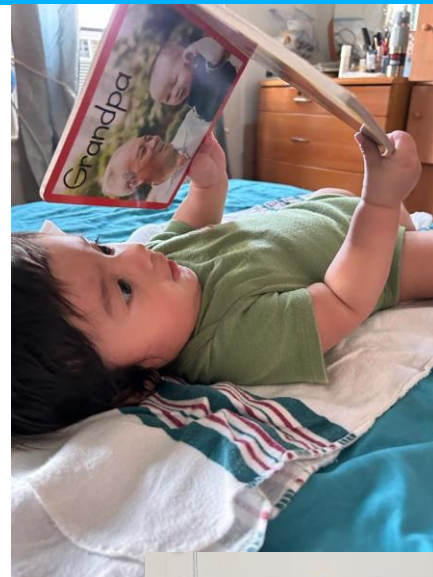
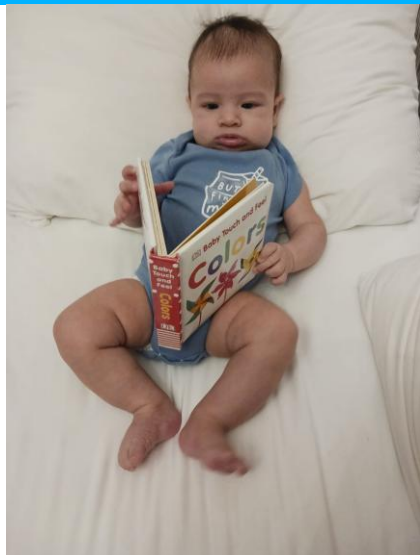




In the Waiting Room, Exam Room and Beyond



Families proud to see their children flourishing





Reach
Out
& Read®



Questions?