



Center for Children and Families

2019 Spring Lecture Series

Two Generations at a Time: Parent Influences on Child Development

"A Relational Health Perspective on Early Development"

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❖ *Defining Relational Health*

Relational health reflects a sense of “connectedness” with attuned others, including caregivers, family members, and other individuals within the community. (Hambrick et al., 2018)

❖ *Theoretical Contributions to the Study of Relational Health (Think A,B,C+)*

Attachment Theory (e.g., Bowlby and Ainsworth)

Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model (e.g., Bronfenbrenner & Morris)

Calming Cycle Theory (e.g., Welch & Ludwig, Hane, Browne and NSP colleagues)

+ Others (e.g., *Family Systems Theory*; Bowen, Cox & Paley, Sameroff, Schoppe-Sullivan)

❖ *The Value of a Relational Health Perspective? It offers REACH.* (e.g., Frosch, Schoppe-Sullivan, & O’Banion; Owen and the work of CCF; Welch, Hane & colleagues)

Reduces blame and burden/destigmatizes difficulty

- (parents affect children; children affect parents)

Emphasizes the establishment and maintenance of connection

- (connection is a process)

Acknowledges that relationships impact health & well-being across the lifespan

- Wider, developmental lens --- bridges physical and psychosocial health

Considers the potential of “others” as co-facilitators/co-supporters of relational health

- NICU Specialists, Pediatricians and Health Care Providers, HVs, etc.

Hopeful – repair is possible

❖ *Measuring Emotional Connection with the WECS (Welch Emotional Connection Screen)*

- Focus on 4 mutual dimensions (3 point scale, .25 increments)
Attraction, Vocal communication, Facial expressiveness, Sensitivity/reciprocity
- Overall rating of EC+ (emotionally connected) or EC- (not emotionally connected)

❖ ***Building Relational Health within Families: A 3-Step Approach***

1. ***Promote EC directly.***

- Draw from the Family Nurture Intervention (focus on emotional expression).
- Engage in repeated, calming interactions that serve to build and/or repair EC.
- Emphasize face-to-face interaction without distractions.

2. ***Support the well-being & efficacy of those who care for children and families.***

- Early Childhood Intervention/Home Visiting Professionals, Pediatric/Primary Care Health Providers, Child care providers/ECEs
- Consider mindfulness practices along with opportunities to grow reflective functioning (explore the value of Reflective Supervision/Consultation).

3. ***Message the literature on co-regulation and relational health for parents, professionals, and community stakeholders.***

- Children are embedded in a system of relationships; healthy relationships support physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and brain health.
- Emotional connection is a relational construct that supports healthy co-regulation.
- In early childhood, the relationship can be viewed as the client/patient.

❖ ***Suggested Websites/Links:***

Nurture Science Program at Columbia University: <https://nurturescienceprogram.org/>

Information about the WECS: <https://nurturescienceprogram.org/wecs/>

Harvard Center on the Developing Child: <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/>

First3Years: <https://first3yearstx.org/> Zero to Three: <https://www.zerotothree.org/>

Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research: <https://www.bctr.cornell.edu/>

Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health: <https://www.allianceaimh.org>

❖ ***Resources: Books/Journal Articles:***

Beebe, B., Myers, M. M., Lee, S. H., Lange, A., Ewing, J., Rubinchik, N., . . . Welch, M. G. (2018).

Family nurture intervention for preterm infants facilitates positive mother–infant face-to-face engagement at 4 months. *Developmental Psychology*, *54*(11), 2016-2031.

Bögels, S., & Restifo, K. (2015). *Mindful parenting: A guide for mental health practitioners*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Calkins, S. D. (Ed). (2015). *Handbook of infant biopsychosocial development*. New York: Guilford.

Frosch, C. A., Fagan, M. A., Lopez, M. A., Middlemiss, W., Chang, M. , Hane, A. A. & Welch, M. G. (2019). Validation study showed that ratings on the Welch Emotional Connection Screen at infant age six months are associated with child behavioural problems at age three years. *Acta Paediatrica*. doi:10.1111/apa.14731

Hambrick, E. P., Brawner, T. W., Perry, B. D., Brandt, K., Hofmeister, C., & Collins, J.O. (2018). Beyond the ACE score: examining relationships between timing of developmental adversity, relational health and developmental outcomes in children. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*. doi:10.1016/j.apnu.2018.11.001

Hane, A. A., LaCoursiere, J. N., Mitsuyama, M. , Wieman, S. , Ludwig, R. J., Kwon, K. Y., V. Browne, J. , Austin, J. , M. Myers, M. & Welch, M. G. (2018). The Welch Emotional Connection Screen: validation of a brief mother–infant relational health screen. *Acta Paediatrica*. doi:10.1111/apa.14483