"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 Biocological Model (e.g., Bronfenbenner & 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/](https://nurturescienceprogram.org/)
- Information about the WECS:  [https://nurturescienceprogram.org/wecs/](https://nurturescienceprogram.org/wecs/)
- Harvard Center on the Developing Child:  [https://developingchild.harvard.edu/](https://developingchild.harvard.edu/)
- First3Years:  [https://first3yearstx.org/](https://first3yearstx.org/)
- Zero to Three:  [https://www.zerotothree.org/](https://www.zerotothree.org/)
- Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research:  [https://www.bctr.cornell.edu/](https://www.bctr.cornell.edu/)
- Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health:  [https://www.alliancemaimh.org](https://www.alliancemaimh.org)

**Resources: Books/Journal Articles:**