Background

As defined by the American Academy of Pediatrics, Early Relational Health is a “framework that explores the role of early relationships and experiences in healthy development across a child’s lifetime.”

Frequent contact provides pediatric clinicians the unique opportunity to promote early relational health and support safe, stable, and nurturing caregiver-child relationships, which lay the foundation for future development, health and wellbeing, and help mitigate the effects of toxic stress.

Few studies have sought to understand parents’ perspectives on how pediatric clinicians can further strengthen relationships with families in the primary care setting to support early relational health.

Objective

To understand parents’ perspectives on how pediatric clinicians can strengthen relationships with families to more effectively support early relational health.

Methods

• Study design: virtual focus groups using guide prepared with input from community partners and parent advisors
• Study population: Convenient samples parents of children age ≤ 7 years in New Jersey.
• Recruitment: Community-engaged approach via collaboration with local partners and pediatric clinicians.
• Data collection: • Demographic survey • Focused groups recorded and transcribed verbatim.
• Data analysis: data analyzed via an immersion-crystallization approach to identify themes within and across focus groups
• Protection of participants: project approved by Institutional Review Board

Results

29 participants (median age 36 years; 48.3% Asian, 17.2% Black/African-American; 37.9% Hispanic/Latino; 82.8% mothers)


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Limitations

• Findings might not transfer to other settings.
• Focus on young children and their families; findings might not transfer to other developmental stages.
• No direct observation of clinical encounters.

Discussion

Clear and timely communication, empathy and cultural sensitivity, adequate time and continuity to build relationships, and additional informational resources were identified as main contributors to effective partnerships between clinicians and families.

Clinicians and policymakers should pay careful attention to these factors in order to build trusted partnerships with families to effectively address early relational health.

Future Steps

• To implement parent suggestions in pediatric practice then reevaluate parent-clinician relationships and the promotion of early relational health.

References