

Turning Developmental Relational Science into Practice

Guest Lecture by Ross A. Thompson
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Abstract: Research-to-practice bridges are being constructed in many ways, especially with initiatives to strengthen language, number concepts, scientific reasoning skills in children. This presentation asks: How can we enlist the findings of developmental relational science to support children? The first part of the talk briefly summarizes studies in our lab to profile some of the conclusions of developmental relational science--in particular, how emotion-focused discourse, support for developing skills of emotion regulation (in the context of manageable emotional demands) and responsiveness to children's feelings and needs contribute to the development of a human connection to others' interests that motivates socially constructive responding beginning in early childhood. The second part examines the implications for practice and policy of the view that psychological health is constructed, maintained, and restored in emotionally supportive relationships. Policy problems related to maintaining supportive relationships for children (divorce and custody, grandparent visitation rights, economic stress on the family) and strengthening supportive systems beyond the family (child protection, social support, child welfare) are considered. Applying developmental relational science to problems in policy and practice like these provides avenues to understanding why relationships are so significant to early childhood mental health, and why they should be a focal orientation of practice and policy.



Ross Thompson is distinguished professor of psychology at the University of California, Davis, and director of the Social & Emotional Development Lab. A developmental psychologist, he studies early parent-child relationships, the development of emotion understanding and emotion regulation, conscience development, prosocial motivation and the growth of self-understanding in young children. He has served twice as associate editor of *Child Development*, was a Senior NIMH Fellow in Law and Psychology at Stanford University in 1989-90, and served on the Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development (1998-2000) and the Committee on the Science of Children Birth to Age 8 (2013-15) of the National Research Council/Institute of Medicine. His books include *Preventing Child Maltreatment Through Social Support: A Critical Analysis* (Sage, 1995), *The Postdivorce Family* (Sage, 1999), *Toward a Child-Centered, Neighborhood-Based Child Protection System* (Praeger, 2002), *Socioemotional Development* (Nebraska Symposium on Motivation; University of Nebraska Press, 1990), and *Infant-Mother Attachment* (Erlbaum, 1985). He is currently working on *Early Brain Development, the Media, and Public Policy*.