

**Early
Childhood
Matters**

2025

The Wellbeing Issue Part II
What parents need for a good start

We need to talk about care: the needs of parents with young children often go unseen and unheard in public life and policy. They face growing pressure, are overworked, and their support systems are strained or disappearing. So what can we do to better support them?

The 2025 edition of [Early Childhood Matters](#) presents 33 compelling contributions that show how everyone can play a role in shaping a more caring society and rebuilding villages of support around parents. Guided by those already leading the way, from neuroscientists to poets, and architects to trauma specialists, the 2025 issue offers bold, practical solutions that meaningfully support mothers, fathers and other caregivers, and the children they care for. Because when we value and celebrate care, we create ripple effects that strengthen families, communities and societies for generations.

Sample social media content

Embargo: Please do not post until **28 January 2025 15:00 CET**

Hashtags

**#ECM2025 #EarlyChildhoodMatters
#WhatParentsNeed #GoodStart
#ListeningToParents**

Important links

[Early Childhood Matters website](#)
[Early Childhood Matters 2025](#)
[Van Leer Foundation website](#)

Social media accounts

Bluesky:

[@ecm-vanleer.bsky.social](#)

Instagram:

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LinkedIn:

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Substack (coming soon)

[@earlychildhoodmatters](#)

Overall launch: Short sample messages

#ECM2025 is out now!

This edition explores what parents and other caregivers need for a #GoodStart.

From the science of human connection to rebuilding villages of support, it's packed full of great ideas and current solutions.

Read it now: bit.ly/ECM2025-online

Care connects us all but parents' needs often go unseen and unheard, especially in the early years.

#EarlyChildhoodMatters 2025 is out now with expert insight on how we can better support them.

Read online now: bit.ly/ECM2025-online

Overall launch: Longer sample message

Early Childhood Matters 2025 is here!

We all need care, but the vital work caregivers do often goes unnoticed. For parents of young children particularly, the global crisis in care means managing daily challenges without adequate support.

But when caregivers thrive, so do their children.

Across 33 articles, #ECM2025 highlights expert analysis on how to care for caregivers. From neuroscience to urban design, poetry to policy, it offers bold solutions and transformative ideas.

Read it now: bit.ly/ECM2025-online

#WhatParentsNeed #GoodStart #ListeningToParents

Short sample messages per article

Article 1: A ghost story, Michael Feigelson

When he became a new parent, Van Leer Foundation CEO Michael Feigelson felt like a ghost - exhausted, invisible, disconnected.

This year's #EarlyChildhoodMatters explores how we can build a world where caregivers feel seen and supported.

📖 Get your free copy now! bit.ly/ECM2025-1

Article 2: When she carried my baby, she carried me too, Elissa Strauss

A stranger held her baby so she could eat. That small kindness sparked a bigger question for #EarlyChildhoodMatters guest editor Elissa Strauss: why don't we take better care of caregivers?

📖 #ECM2025 explores the answer. Out now! bit.ly/ECM2025-2



Section 1: Understanding Human Connection

Article 3: “Love really protects you, the parent and the baby”, Ruth Feldman

Love is more than emotion. It's biology.

Prof. Ruth Feldman's research on the science of synchrony reveals just how much love reshapes both parent and baby — from brain development to immune health.

Discover how caregiving transforms us in #ECM2025: bit.ly/ECM2025-3

Article 4: “Dad brain” is real, Darby Saxbe

Fatherhood transforms men's brains in profound ways, but many dads face postpartum depression, sleep challenges and stigma.

Read more about how we can support new fathers in #ECM2025: bit.ly/ECM2025-4

Article 5: Helping parents “dance” with their children, Kaili Clackson and Stanimira Georgieva

Synchrony between parents and children, like sharing smiles during peek-a-boo or responding to coos, is essential for building bonds.

In #ECM2025, learn the simple steps to help parents and babies boost synchrony and connect and thrive. bit.ly/ECM2025-5

Article 6: It's not so easy to be a "good enough parent", Dana Shai

Parenting isn't about perfection.

"Good enough parenting" means letting kids face frustration – like not getting that bedtime biscuit – while still feeling loved.

Psychologist Dana Shai shares two ways to help parents get there
#ECM2025: bit.ly/ECM2025-6

Article 7: How conversations over coffee reduced maternal mortality rates, Kesete Admasu

Ethiopia's maternal mortality rate dropped from 960 to 267 per 100,000 births by 2020.

Former Health Minister Kesete Admasu oversaw the transformation. In #ECM2025, he shares how coffee ceremonies and cultural connection transformed care: bit.ly/ECM2025-7

Article 8: Parenting begins in pregnancy, Catherine Monk

Supporting mothers in pregnancy = healthier, happier children.

In #ECM2025, Dr. Catherine Monk shares science-backed solutions to improve maternal mental health:

- ✓ Integrating mental health care into prenatal visits
- ✓ Postpartum support groups
- ✓ Stress management education

bit.ly/ECM2025-8

Article 9: “I wanted to understand the evolution of man-the-nurturer”, Sarah Blaffer Hrdy

Anthropologist Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, who has spent 50 years studying the evolution of caregiving, says we've forgotten how humans evolved... Parenting was never solo. it was shared.

In #ECM2025, Hrdy reveals what our ancestors can teach us about modern parenting. bit.ly/ECM2025-9

Article 10: Maintaining and celebrating rural indigenous practices in Brazilian cities, Melina Carlota Pereira

Displaced indigenous communities face unique challenges in urban areas.

The key to preserving their culture and identity? Thoughtful policies that respect indigenous knowledge and bridge the gap between tradition and adaptation

Learn more in #ECM2025: bit.ly/ECM2025-10

Article 11: “The more we give ourselves, the more we have to give others”, Kristin Neff


Parents who practise self-compassion show their children that being imperfect is okay.

Psychologist Kristin Neff shares 3 practical ways for caregivers to cultivate self-compassion in #ECM2025: bit.ly/ECM2025-11

Article 12: Finding sanity in ancient ritual, Elissa Strauss

Rituals can offer parents something rare: a chance to pause.

For Elissa Strauss, the ancient practice of Shabbat brought clarity, connection and calm to the chaos of parenting.

 Read her powerful reflection on the importance of rituals matter #ECM2025: bit.ly/ECM2025-12

Article 13: “It would have been very strange not to write about such a revealing, transformative experience”, Alejandro Zambran

“We should all write. To write is to make mistakes, to allow oneself contradictions, uncertainties.” – Alejandro Zambra.

In #ECM2025, the novelist reflects on how writing helps parents process the profound changes of parenthood. Read more: bit.ly/ECM2025-13

Article 14: The power of awe in early parenthood, Dacher Keltner

Awe is a powerful emotion, but it's easy to overlook in parenting. Yet awe can bring more joy, balance & connection to caregiving.

In The Science of Happiness podcast for #ECM2025, Dacher Keltner explores how awe transforms early parenthood.

Listen here bit.ly/ECM2025-14

Article 15: “We’re all trying to think about how care works”, Alison Gopnik

Caregiving is central to humanity but invisible in research & policy. Why? And how can we better support caregivers?

Psychologist Alison Gopnik knows that it's about more than childcare & leave — it's about rethinking care itself.

Read the interview with her in #ECM2025 out now! bit.ly/ECM2025-15



Section 2: Rebuilding Villages of Support

Article 16: Five urban design choices that make a world of difference for parents, Sree Kumar Kumaraswamy, Madhura Kulkarni and Visakha KA

Urban design that supports caregivers means healthier, happier cities.

From doorstep play areas in Kochi to caregiver-friendly maternity hospitals in Bangalore, #NurturingNeighbourhoods is transforming lives across India.

Read more about the impact in #ECM2025: bit.ly/ECM2025-16

Article 17: How Arab cities in Israel are recreating a sense of connection, Noor Korabi

In rapidly growing cities, how can we rebuild the connection families once relied on?

Urban95's Noor Korabi works to create safe, supportive spaces where families can feel seen, supported and connected.

Read how in #EarlyChildhoodMatters: bit.ly/ECM2025-17

Article 18: "Intergenerational housing is back", Mariam Issoufou

What if architecture respected culture and community?

Architect Mariam Issoufou's Niamey 2000 — an affordable housing project balancing family privacy, shared spaces and cultural traditions — shows how.

Read more about her principles of people-first design in #ECM2025 bit.ly/ECM2025-18

Article 19: Family hubs change how children and caregivers experience parks in Jordan, Muhsen Albawab and Qasem Alrousan

The Family Hub reimagines parks as community-centred spaces where children and caregivers can thrive, transforming a once little-used area into a vibrant place for families to meet and play.

Discover how and the impact of community-centred design in #ECM2025. bit.ly/ECM2025-19

Article 20: How to transform public spaces to encourage intergenerational play, Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority

What happens when cities prioritise families?

In Abu Dhabi:

- ✓ Play materials inspire creativity
- ✓ Picnic tables spark connections
- ✓ Hammocks & cycling tracks bring fun

The result? Less screen time, more face time, and more joy. Learn how design builds communities in #ECM2025. bit.ly/ECM2025-20

Article 21: Ask a parent: How are you? Libby Kahn

How do we best support caregivers? The Shalem programme offers 3 powerful lessons:

- 1 Reinforce positives: Highlight what they're doing well.
- 2 Show appreciation: Praise their efforts to help them feel valued.

Discover the third lesson in #ECM2025: bit.ly/ECM2025-21

Article 22: How black women reclaimed care in São Paulo, Ana Carolina Barros Silva, Camila Generoso, Kezia Paz and Tâmara Calheira

In São Paulo, Casa de Marias is reclaiming care for black mothers — creating spaces to breathe, heal and grow.

In #ECM2025, explore how culturally sensitive mental health care can empower communities that are underserved and marginalised. bit.ly/ECM2025-22

Article 23: A place for dads to feel safe and ask questions, Rich Felisia

Sometimes, a man's ego makes it very difficult to seek help or to ask questions.' – Rich Felisia, founder of Daddy's Place

Read how Daddy's Place is creating safe spaces for young fathers to connect, share and grow in #ECM2025 bit.ly/ECM2025-23

Article 24: Good housing can make parenting less lonely, Dinah Bornat and Irina Ivan - van der Kwaak

Babies, toddlers & caregivers spend a huge amount of time at or near home? Around 80% on average.

That's why 3 things are key for designing housing for families:

- 1 Families need storage, play areas & practical layouts.
- 2 Shared courtyards foster connection.

Find the third here bit.ly/ECM2025-24 #ECM2025

Article 25: Caring connections, Isolde Woudstra

Photographer Isolde Woudstra wanted to create an ode to the joy and mess of raising children in the Netherlands.

They're a tender and honest glimpse into our most intimate relationships, bonds woven from care, love, and ordinary moments.

See the gorgeous photo essay in full: bit.ly/ECM2025-25

Article 26: When work works for parents and families, everybody wins, Brigid Schulte

How can workplaces better support families?

Brigid Schulte has 7 practical strategies:

- 1 Ask and listen before acting
- 2 Take a care inventory
- 3 Redefine the 'ideal worker'
- 4 Streamline the workweek'

Discover the rest in #ECM2025 bit.ly/ECM2025-26

Article 27: Taking care of business by taking care of parents, Erik Manfrim and João Paulo Camarinha Figueira

Workplaces thrive when employees' families are cared for.

At this company in Brazil, family-friendly policies have been transforming lives for 23 years.

Learn exactly how they do it in #ECM2025: bit.ly/ECM2025-27

An illustration of a landscape with a waterfall on the left and people on the right. The scene is rendered in a stylized, textured manner with a color palette of blues, browns, and yellows. In the foreground, a man in a yellow shirt holds a baby, and a woman in a striped shirt stands beside him. In the background, two more figures are visible near the waterfall.

Section 3: Collective Approaches to Healing

Article 28: “When I hold their baby, I say a blessing for life”, Lama Abuarqoub and Hamutal Gouri

Palestinian and Israeli peace activists Lama Abuarqoub and Hamutal Gouri share how motherhood has shaped their activism, how they go about supporting new mothers in their communities, and how, as mothers and peace activists, they have experienced the war.

Read the powerful interview in full bit.ly/ECM2025-28 #ECM2025

Article 29: Protecting children begins with healing parents, Alicia F. Lieberman

Trauma doesn't just affect individuals. It shapes families.

Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP) helps parents heal from their past and transform fear and anger into compassion for their children.

Discover how CPP nurtures families in #ECM2025: bit.ly/ECM2025-29

Article 30: “I learned a lot about trauma through parenting”, Bessel van der Kolk

Bessel van der Kolk, author of *The Body Keeps the Score*, shares in #ECM2025 how becoming a parent deepened his understanding of trauma.

Read more on how caregivers' presence fosters growth and recovery. bit.ly/ECM2025-30

Article 31: Breaking the cycle of generational trauma before parenthood, Shauna M. Murray, Vincent Sezibera, Darius Gishoma, Gilbert Munyemana and Theresa S. Betancourt

In Rwanda, children born during and after the 1994 genocide are now parents themselves.

The Sugira Muryango programme, developed with the Rwandan government and researchers, helps families strengthen bonds and break cycles of generational trauma.

Learn more in #ECM2025: bit.ly/ECM2025-31

Article 32: Healing the past to protect the future, Andrés Moya and Camila Londoño

Semillas de Apego is planting seeds of healing for caregivers in Colombia who are dealing with the impacts of conflict and displacement.

The key? Focusing on caregiver well-being to nurture secure families.

Read more in #EarlyChildhoodMatters: bit.ly/ECM2025-32

Article 33: Becoming a parent with the legacy of civil war, Abdulai Jawo Bah, Candace J. Black, Kashiya Nwanguma and Theresa S. Betancourt

What resources can we offer families to address traumatic experiences?

A 22-year study in Sierra Leone shows how informal networks like faith communities and mothers' groups are helping families navigate generational trauma. But more is needed.

📖 Discover in #ECM2025: bit.ly/ECM2025-33

About Early Childhood Matters

Early Childhood Matters, published by the Van Leer Foundation since 1998, elevates key issues, spreads awareness of promising solutions to support holistic child development, and explores the elements needed to take those solutions to scale. Read globally, shared freely.

About the Van Leer Foundation

Based in The Hague, the Netherlands, the Van Leer Foundation is an independent organisation working globally to foster inclusive societies where all children and communities can flourish. Since 1949, the Foundation has supported initiatives in early childhood development, human sciences and the arts. Its work is guided by a commitment to scalable solutions and deep collaboration with partners worldwide.

Credit: Annelien Smet

