HOPE
HEALTHY OUTCOMES
FROM POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

The 4 Building Blocks of HOPE

Research has shown that Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) can help protect against the poor health outcomes associated with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). [These PCEs can be categorized into 4 Building Blocks.] This resource is designed to help families increase access to the Building Blocks for the children they serve.

RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships within the family and with other children and adults through interpersonal activities.

Being in nurturing, supportive relationships are critical for children to develop into healthy, resilient adults. Individuals that recall having these types of relationships during childhood experience significantly lower rates of depression and poor mental during adulthood. What types of relationships are we talking about?

- Foundational relationships with parents and/or caregivers who respond to a child's needs and offer warm, responsive interactions
- Adults outside of the family who take a genuine interest in a child and support their growth and development
- Healthy, close, and positive relationships with peers

How can you promote access to supportive relationships for your child(ren)?
- Think about your positive relationships from childhood. What felt good about them? Are there things about those relationships that you can bring to your relationship with your child(ren)?
- Play and connect with your child(ren) regularly! Be silly, move your bodies together, read a book, watch a movie. The options are endless!
- Help your child make connections with other adults in your life- aunts, uncles, coaches, pastors. It takes a village, and the larger your child's village, the more opportunities they have for connection and support!

Safe, equitable, stable environments for living, playing, and learning at home and in school.

Children who live, learn, and play in safe, stable, and equitable environments are less likely to experience poor mental and physical health as adults. What do we mean by safe, stable, and equitable environments?

- A safe, stable environment, secure in meeting a child's basic needs, including adequate food, shelter, and healthcare.
- A nurturing home where a child is emotionally secure.
- A stable school environment where children feel valued and receive high-quality education
- A community environment to play and interact with other children safely and equitably

How can you promote access to safe, stable, equitable environments?
- Check your house for safety issues including access to guns, medications, alcohol, and drugs. Create a plan to address any identified risks.
- Talk with your child(ren) about school. Do they feel safe there? Are they being treated well by their peers? If not, connect with their teacher and brainstorm solutions.
- Help your child find safe places to play outdoors. Is there a backyard space or local park where they can safely play with friends?

Social and civic engagement to develop a sense of belonging and connectedness.

Children need to feel connected to their communities, loved, and appreciated. Involvement in social institutions and environments, awareness of cultural customs and traditions, and a cultivated "sense of mattering" and belonging helps children develop into secure and resilient adults. What are some examples of social and community engagement?

- Being involved in projects, peer-mentoring, or community service through one's school or religious organization
- Partaking in family cultural traditions
- Participating in organized music, art, or sports

How can you promote access to social and civic engagement?
- Sign your child up for after school activities that interest them.
- Consider volunteering in the community as a family.
- Get involved in your place of worship, if that feels supportive. Many spiritual and religious institutions have youth groups or classes geared towards children.
- Develop a sense of mattering in your child by encouraging them to engage in household tasks.

Opportunities for social and emotional growth.

Children need to have ample opportunity to develop their sense of self-awareness and social cognition, learn how to self-regulate emotions and behaviors, and acquire skills needed to respond functionally and productively to challenges. Many of these skills arise during child-centered play. Some children will naturally pick up these skills, others may need adults to help them name and understand their own feelings. Either way, these skills are critical for children to be able to become resilient, emotionally healthy adults. What do we mean by opportunities for social and emotional growth?

- Developing a sense of emotional and behavioral self-regulation
- Having the ability to respond to challenges in a productive manner
- Developing key socially and culturally appropriate communication and interpersonal skills

How can you support social and emotional growth in your child(ren)?

- Help children name their feelings as they arise, and talk about what that feeling feels like in the child's body.
- Normalize disagreements with friends, and model or role play about how to disagree respectively and productively.
- Make time for unstructured play with friends and siblings.

Information in this handout is sourced from research done by Dr. Robert Sege from the Center for Community-Engaged Medicine at Tufts Medical Center and Dr. Charlyn Harper Browne from the Center for the Study of Social Policy. The Building Blocks were first published in the following paper:

Sege and Browne. Responding to ACEs with HOPE: Health Outcomes from Positive Experiences. Academic Pediatrics 2017; 17:S79-S85

To learn more about HOPE, the 4 Building Blocks, and more, visit positiveexperience.org or email HOPE@tuftsmedicalcenter.org.