

## **The Transformational Impact of HOPE**

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HOPE (Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences) is a framework that changes the way service providers engage with children and families. At the HOPE National Resource Center, we are transforming systems to create a research-based structured approach to care through positive childhood experiences.

PCEs are experiences that support healthy growth and development and can promote resilience and healing in the face of adversity. In contrast, adverse childhood experiences and adverse childhood environments (ACEs) contribute to toxic stress, which has been shown to lead to poor mental health if left unmitigated. These ACEs arise from social and community issues, such as poverty, discrimination, and other forms of oppression and adversity. Dr. Wendy Ellis and Dr. Bill Dietz at The George Washington University created the Pair of ACEs Tree to portray this concept<sup>1</sup>.

### **Promoting Healing Amid Stresses**

PCEs protect the brain and promote healing for people who have experienced ACEs. In the presence of PCEs, adverse experiences in childhood do not always result in lifelong poor mental health. Knowing that PCEs can prevent ACEs, block toxic stress, and promote healing, the HOPE framework incorporates PCEs alongside ACEs. Understanding what is going well in a child, youth, or family's life is important to understanding them.

Asking about what is going well for children and families is a reformative practice that helps people see that their lives are not all about their trauma. They do have positivity in their lives, and we can work together to improve access to those PCEs. PCEs are becoming as widely known as ACEs in child and family service systems – including education. The HOPE

framework helps educators identify, honor, and promote PCEs in a child's life, both inside and outside of educational settings.

### **A Foundation of Positivity**

HOPE is founded on research that analyzed responses from the 2018 Wisconsin Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System survey<sup>2</sup>. This survey, distributed nationally in the United States, asks adults questions regarding health-related risk behaviors and chronic health conditions.

Researchers added seven questions to this survey to examine different types of positive experiences. These added questions asked about participants positive experiences during their childhood:

- Did you feel able to talk to your family about feelings?
- Did you feel your family stood by you during difficult times?
- Did you enjoy participating in community traditions?
- Did you feel a sense of belonging in high school?
- Did you feel supported by friends?
- Did you have at least two non-parent adults who took genuine interest in you?
- Did you feel safe and protected by an adult in your home?

Responses showed that PCEs protect future adult mental health<sup>2</sup>. Participants with six to seven PCEs had a 72% lower chance of experiencing depression or poor mental health compared to those who experienced zero to two PCEs. Those who experienced three to five PCEs still found a reduced likelihood of depression or poor mental health, lower by 50% compared to those who experienced zero to two PCEs. These results remained the same even in the face of adversity, highlighting the protective nature of PCEs.

Similar findings were evident in a research by Huang et al. who found that PCEs were independently associated with lower risks of fair or poor adult health and adult mental health, and with developing any physical or mental health condition at any given age after adjusting for ACEs<sup>3</sup>. The healing abilities of PCEs has also shown to be significant internationally, as seen in a study conducted in Australia<sup>4,5</sup>. HOPE takes this research and applies it to practice.

### **The Building Blocks of HOPE**

The HOPE framework consists of four evidence-based building blocks, which describe the types of key positive childhood experiences that are critical for a healthy development. Dr. Charlyn Harper Browne and the leader of HOPE, Dr. Robert Sege, found that these four categories – relationships, environment, engagement, and emotional growth – to help define what positive experiences that promote resilience and healthy adult mental health look like in practice <sup>6</sup>.

**Relationships** – This Relationships building block refers to healthy, nurturing, and supportive relationships. This can mean a strong relationship between parent and child, and it also can include relationships with peer or other adults in a child’s life. There are many opportunities in school settings to promote strong and healthy relationships with teachers, tutors, aids, social workers, administrators, and custodial staff members.

**Environment** - This Environment building block refers to safe, stable, and equitable environments in which children live, learn, and play. School plays a significant role in this building block because it is an environment where children spend most of their time. This building block flourishes when children can be themselves without fear and feel physically safe. During school hours, positive experiences are provided when students have the space for their voices to be heard and when materials in the classroom reflect students’ diverse cultures,

backgrounds, and life experiences. When school is out for the day, positive experiences can be provided through afterschool programs for children whose parents are at work.

**Engagement** – This Engagement building block refers to social and civic engagement.

Engagement instills a sense of worth and pride in children when they are contributing to the community. Such PCEs can be provided through formal volunteer opportunities, sports, and afterschool clubs, or even by assigning chores for students to do in the classroom. Teachers can assign duties such as cleaning the white board or handing out classroom materials.

**Emotional Growth** – The Emotional Growth building block refers to the growth children experience through play, nature, and spirituality. Emotional growth can occur when children have access to safe playgrounds, green spaces, and child-centered play experiences, and through cultural and spiritual practices. When children experience losing a game or failing a test in a supportive environment, they grow emotionally where they understand that the adults in their lives will not look at them differently or see them as a bad person.

The Four Building Blocks of HOPE provide a guide about what areas of a child's life helps them access PCEs. Each building block can stand on its own; no one block is more important than the other. Many experiences cover multiple building blocks or sometimes all of them. We also have the opportunity to explore which blocks are harder for children or wider communities to experience. Is there gun violence in the neighborhood where their schools are located? This would be a barrier to safe environments. On the positive side, school lunches can provide a safe environment for children whose families are experiencing food insecurity. When we explore children's access to these building blocks, we can more easily identify the ways they are flourishing and where there are gaps in their access.

## **A Path to Understanding and Healing**

HOPE is a game changer in how we frame a new way of understanding a child's or youth's whole experience, not just their bad ones. When children and youth are assessed in school environments, it is important to understand the trauma they have experienced to help understand their behavior and mental health. However, we also need to understand what is going well in their lives and families to see where they are thriving and the opportunities they have to heal, build resilience, and thrive in adulthood.

The framework describes the Four Building Blocks of HOPE broadly, in order to fit many diverse experiences. There is no one way to practice each block, and the use of these blocks looks different from family to family, child to child. Children and families can define what each block looks like in their life, often building on understanding of their culture, values, and circumstances.

To learn more about the child, youth, or family, ask questions that show your interest in what is going well. Questions like “What is your favorite sport or hobby? Is there someone you like to do that with?” help the person answering recognize the value to the things that going well in their life, providing a sense of pride, love, and value. You are gaining information about their engagement, as well as about the strong relationships in their life. Recognizing and valuing sources of strength and stamina can become easy as you incorporate it into your practice, and it can transform your relationships with students.

## **HOPE National Resource Center**

The HOPE National Resource Center (NRC) is a team based at Tufts Medical Center in the Center for Community-Engaged Medicine under the Institute for Clinical Research and Health

Policy Studies. The HOPE NRC provides training and technical assistance to help individuals and organizations become familiar with the HOPE framework and create small-and large-scale changes to their day-to-day work. The HOPE NRC offers several trainings that cover the basics of HOPE, as well as more in-depth specifics on how to practice HOPE in specific sectors. There are also opportunities for people to become HOPE Facilitators, where they are trained to go into the community and facilitate an introduction to HOPE. Many become trained facilitators and disseminate the trainings or provide technical assistance to their own organizations as they work to become more HOPE-informed. Facilitators can choose to become HOPE Champions, where they are trained to provide technical assistance to organizations that are looking for more specific support.

The HOPE NRC also offers many different opportunities to learn as an organization or individually. Yearly we offer our HOPE Innovation Network, where organizations can take a six-month course to create HOPE-informed changes. We offer other learning communities, and individual group trainings that can be done in-person, remotely, or through our new Online Learning Hub.

HOPE (Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences) transforms how we view children, youth, and families in many settings. The HOPE framework moves beyond deficit-based models and encourages those who work with child, youth, and families to look deeper in order to find what is going well and identify the strengths each person possesses. Implementing the HOPE framework at the individual or organizational level changes your relationship with the child, youth, and families you serve. This framework provides a guide to help prioritize healing and building resilience.

To learn more about HOPE visit us at our website, [positiveexperience.org](https://positiveexperience.org), where you can submit requests for trainings, sign up to be a HOPE Facilitator and Champion, have access to all our resources, read our weekly blog posts, and learn about our latest research.

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