

The Four Building Blocks of HOPE

for educators

Research shows that positive childhood experiences (PCEs) help children grow into healthy, resilient adults. The HOPE framework centers around the Four Building Blocks of HOPE, key types of PCEs that all children need to thrive. This resource is designed to help educators increase access to the Building Blocks for the children they serve.

Relationships



Safe and supportive relationships within the family and with other children and adults

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 health during adulthood.

What kinds of relationships are we talking about?

- Foundational relationships with parents who respond to a child's needs and offer warm, responsive reactions.
- 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 educators promote access to safe and supportive relationships?

- Be a supportive relationship! Take the time to connect with children in your class, especially those you know or suspect might not have many adults who believe in them.
- Share information with the child about after school activities where they might connect with coaches, mentors, or peers.
- Connect children who could use more supportive relationships with the school guidance counselor.

Environments



Safe, stable, and equitable environments where children can live, learn, and play.

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 health care.
- 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 educators promote access to safe, stable, equitable environments?

- Make your classroom a safe space for all students! Address bullying and teasing in the moment and encourage your class to be upstanders instead of bystanders.\
- Diversify materials in your classroom to make sure that children feel represented. Look at the books on the shelf, posters on the wall, and examples in your curricula. Are all kinds of families, all genders, all races, all abilities represented?
- If your school doesn't already provide supplemental food over breaks to students who receive free lunches, talk to your administration to see if you can start a program.
- Know the community resources! More students than you think come to school hungry, without secure housing, and having witnessed violence in the home. Be the person who notices and connects them with support.

Engagement



Opportunities for 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 sense that they matter and belong helps them develop into secure and resilient adults.

What are some examples of social and civic engagement?

- Being involved in projects, peer mentoring, or community service through one's school or religious organization.
- Participating in family and cultural traditions.
- Joining a music, art, or sports group.

How can educators promote access to social and civic engagement?

- Ask students what they do outside of school, and delight with them around those activities. Consider having students create projects sharing with their classmates about their favorite social activity.
- Have fliers in the classroom for community centers, after school activities, and mentoring programs in your community.
- Encourage civic engagement and volunteering in your classroom.
- Consider offering your own after-school opportunity to engage the children in your classroom.

Emotional Growth



Opportunities for emotional growth where children feel supported through difficult events and emotions.

Children need to have a lot of opportunities to develop their sense of self-awareness and social cognition, learn how to self-regulate emotions and behavior, and acquire skills needed to respond functionally and productively to challenges. Many of these skills arise during child-centered play.

Some children will pick up these skills naturally, but 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 way.
- Developing key social and culturally-appropriate communication and interpersonal skills.

How can educators support social and emotional growth?

- Help a student name their feelings as they arise and talk about what that feeling feels like in the student's body.
- Normalize disagreements in peer groups and share information about how to disagree respectfully and productively.
- Allow time for unstructured play.