

The Four Building Blocks of HOPE

for families

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 families increase access to the Building Blocks for their children.

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 you promote access to safe and 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!

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 you promote access to safe, stable, and 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?

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 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.

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 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 respectfully and productively.
- Make time for unstructured play with friends and siblings.