

HOPE as an anti-racism framework in action

The HOPE framework centers around the [Four Building Blocks of HOPE](#) - safe and supportive relationships, safe, equitable, and stable environments, opportunities for social and civic engagement, and opportunities for emotional growth. These are key types of positive childhood experiences (PCEs) and can be incorporated into the decision-making process at every level and in every sector to ensure that all children, including children of color, have what they need to thrive.



Systemic racism, historical trauma, and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) often disrupt children's access to the Four Building Blocks. HOPE-Informed organizations can partner with their communities, and, together, identify existing resources to implement the HOPE framework and to address unmet needs. Working together, organizations and their communities can ensure that every family and child can have access to these key PCEs that promote resiliency.

[Racism is harmful to all of us.](#) Anti-racism frameworks intentionally change racist policies and practices to combat white supremacy. As author and anti-racism activist Ibram X. Kendi describes it, a racist policy is "any measure that produces or sustains racial inequality."

Anti-racist work requires acknowledgement that systems, institutions, policies, practices and norms privilege white people, even when they do not explicitly mention race. While bias can happen at the individual level, providers, practitioners, and educators are operating within systems that were built on racist foundations.

This resource focuses on systemic racism and unconscious bias. It walks you through the process of thinking about policy and practice change from an anti-racist, HOPE-Informed lens. The information here is grounded by Anti-Racist Organizational Change: [Resources & Tools for Nonprofits](#) created by CommunityWise Resource Centre.

Let's take a look at how a HOPE-Informed organization might address two notable racial disparities in systems that serve children and families. In each of the following scenarios, we will follow the same process:

In each of the following scenarios, the same process will be followed:



1. Start with data

What is the racial disparity you are trying to address, and how does it connect to one of the Four Building Blocks of HOPE?



2. Engage the community

How do those most affected by the disparity feel? What do they see as the problem? What would they like to see in the solution?



3. Prioritize and change policy

What change(s) can you make to increase access to one or more of the Four Building Blocks of HOPE?

As you work through each problem, keep in mind that effective change processes require the active engagement and inclusion of people from diverse racial, ethnic, economic, and social groups. This especially includes those impacted by the disparity at hand. Make sure that your process includes your colleagues and other stakeholders from the community you serve, so that brainstorming and problem-solving are based on relevant values and experiences.

Pre-school

Ezra is a 3-year-old Black child in preschool who is playing with blocks with another child. The other child snatches the block away from him. Ezra, in an attempt to take the block back, accidentally pushes over the other child. Because this is the third time that Ezra has been involved in a "violent" incident, Ezra is suspended from preschool.



1. Start with data

What is the racial disparity you are trying to address, and how does it connect to one of the Four Building Blocks of HOPE?

According to the [U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights](#), Black preschoolers are disproportionately expelled and suspended from preschool in America. These disruptions can have [long-lasting effects](#) on children's educational attainment. School expulsion has other consequences. In low income homes, it can worsen financial hardship because parents have to decide between going to work and caring for their child. In food insecure homes, children lose out on meals provided during school hours.

Access to quality preschool can bolster resiliency in children across all Four Building Blocks of HOPE.

- **Relationships:** A strong relationship between a child and a preschool teacher increases the number of supportive relationships a child can depend on.
- **Safe, Equitable, and Stable Environments:** The school setting serves as a safe, stable, and (hopefully) equitable environment for playing and learning.
- **Social and Civic Engagement:** Preschool is one of the first spaces away from home where children develop a sense of belonging.
- **Emotional Growth:** Children develop emotional regulation through interaction with peers.



2. Engage the community

How do those most affected by the disparity feel? What do they see as the problem? What would they like to see in the solution?

Based on this data, you and your colleagues host a community forum with current and previous families of color from your school. What you hear is unsettling. You know there is no written expulsion policy in your preschool. Families state loudly and clearly that the absence of a policy allows individual providers to make their own decisions. That approach allows for implicit bias. This lack of standardized policy creates an environment where racist practices can thrive.

Parents share that their children's behaviors are treated as willful disobedience, with little insight into the lives of the children and their families. One parent shares a research article showing that, in fact, **children of color are seen as more culpable for misbehavior and receive harsher punishments than white peers**. Often, parents or family members, also living through the same systemic racism as the child, face the providers judgement, rather than being welcomed as partners to redirect the child's behavior.

The community is asking for a clear policy about when children can be expelled and an all-staff training on implicit bias.



3. Prioritize and change policy

What change(s) can you make to increase access to one or more of the Four Building Blocks of HOPE?

In response, you create a committee to develop a clear, objective policy. The goals of the new policy are to decrease the number of expulsions in your school and to increase access to the Four Building Blocks. This group includes teachers, administrators, and parents of children of color. Additionally, you find a trainer who can offer implicit bias and anti-racism training to preschool teachers.

Doctor's Office

Alicia is an 8-year-old Black child with asthma who lives in an apartment by the freeway with mold and mildew in the bathroom. Her mom does her best to keep the area clean, but her landlord has not responded to her requests for help. Alicia has missed several days of school for asthma symptoms this year.



1. Start with data

What is the racial disparity you are trying to address, and how does it connect to one of the Four Building Blocks of HOPE?

Research shows that **Black children are nearly five times more likely than white children to die from asthma-related complications**. This disparity comes from systemic and **environmental racism** in housing. **Redlining** was a racist housing practice that identified areas where people of color lived as hazardous to investment. This has caused problems with access to credit, health care, and food. Often, people in communities that were redlined experience high pollution, poor living conditions, under-funded schools, and bad landlords.

This disparity affects children's access to the second Building Block of HOPE.

- **Safe, Equitable, and Stable Environments:** Managing asthma effectively often requires changes to living environments to ensure that the child has a home free of habitability issues. Pests, mold, mildew, and dust mites can worsen asthma control and trigger asthma attacks, even with medication.



2. Engage the community

How do those most affected by the disparity feel? What do they see as the problem? What would they like to see in the solution?

At the end of their doctor's appointments, you start asking parents of children with asthma about their experience with their child's diagnosis. You notice that Black parents experience frustration that their children are still having attacks and flare-ups. No medication seems to help. After asking more questions, you learn that often, Black families are living in homes with asthma triggers. When you share that the environment may be making their child's asthma worse, many parents say that this is new information to them. They seem eager for more information about the safety of their homes. But many of them are also say that they will need support getting their landlords to make the needed changes.



3. Prioritize and change policy

What change(s) can you make to increase access to one or more of the Four Building Blocks of HOPE?

Helping families assess their home environment is the first step to better control their child's asthma. You work with the Department of Public Health to create a screening check list that parents can complete in the office. When these results suggest poor housing conditions or code violations, parents are connected with a visiting nurse to help them address the issues as much as possible. Also, they are provided with a template letter from the local legal aid agency to request that the landlord make the needed repairs.

At the systems level, your clinic educates local officials about this health disparity. Additionally, you partner with the local legal aid agency. Together, you host evening workshops to support families with medical-legal partnerships that can assist with addressing housing issues when property owners are unresponsive.

Now you try it!

See if you use the three questions above to add a HOPE-Informed point-of-view to your work, to change a racist policy, or to decrease the impact of systemic racism on the children and families you serve.

And remember, this process is only truly effective in decreasing disparities when you include people from the communities you are serving! Ask yourself who is missing from the decision-making processes. Then, invite them to be a part of the solution. All of us at the HOPE National Resource Center encourage you to put on your HOPE-Informed lenses and to commit to infusing HOPE into the community where you live and work.

Stuck? We would love to brainstorm with you. Reach out to HOPE@tuftsmedicalcenter.org to find new ways that your organization can use HOPE as an anti-racism framework.

Resources

Four Building Blocks of HOPE (HOPE Resource)

<https://positiveexperience.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/The-Four-Building-Blocks-of-HOPE-Handout.pdf>

Talking About Race (National Museum of African American History & Culture)

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race>

Anti-Racist Organizational Change: Resources & Tools for Nonprofits

(CommunityWise Resource Centre)

https://communitywise.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/AROC-Resources-and-Tools_web.pdf

Discipline Practices in Preschool (U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights)

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-DOE-Discipline-Practices-in-Preschool-part1.pdf>

Preschool Suspension and Expulsion: Defining the Issues (Institute for Child Success)

<https://www.instituteforchildsuccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/ICS-2018-PreschoolSuspensionBrief-WEB.pdf>

Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood (Georgetown Law)

<https://www.law.georgetown.edu/poverty-inequality-center/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2017/08/girlhood-interrupted.pdf>

Solutions for Asthma Disparities (PubMed Central)

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5330398/>

Trump's EPA Concludes Environmental Racism Is Real (The Atlantic)

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/02/the-trump-administration-finds-that-environmental-racism-is-real/554315/>

The Legacy of Redlining (UrbanDisplacement Project, Youtube Video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRiOCEaFrOU>