

HOPE for Educators

Toolkit

Introduction

Through this toolkit you will learn how HOPE (Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences) can be incorporated into a school setting. We at the HOPE National Resource Center have worked with HOPE Facilitators and Champions across the country who are implementing HOPE in school settings. Together, we've created this toolkit that pulls together the resources we have about HOPE in the classroom that might be helpful to YOU as you bring HOPE to your school.

We know that children's brains and our bodies respond to all experiences, positive and negative. Key types of Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) promote health and well-being well into adulthood even in the face of trauma, which is known to negatively impact our health.

Research shows that PCEs are essential for helping children thrive in school and beyond. The more PCEs a child has, the better their adult health and wellbeing outcomes are later in life. PCEs can be grouped into four key building blocks:

1. **Positive Relationships**; positive and safe relationships with caregivers, peers, and other adults who really care about the child.
2. **Safe and Stable Environments**; safe and stable places to live, learn, and play where children have access to their basic needs and feel physically and emotionally safe.
3. **Social and Civic Engagement**; opportunities for children to be a part of something bigger than themselves to develop that sense of mattering and belonging.
4. **Emotional Growth**; opportunities for children to learn more about regulating their emotions, naming feelings in their bodies, navigating conflict, and developing empathy.



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Introduction continued

On the other hand, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) refer to potentially traumatic events that can impede a child's development. ACEs can be categorized into three main types:

1. Abuse
2. Neglect
3. Household Challenges

Examples of ACEs in school-aged children may include exposure to domestic violence, bullying in school, or the challenges of living with a caregiver struggling with substance use. Such experiences can affect a child's ability to focus, engage, and succeed in the classroom, as well as negatively impact their own sense of self. But this is only half of the equation. Even when children are experiencing adversity at home or in school, connection to meaningful PCEs can promote health and thriving.

As educators, you play a critical role in increasing access to PCEs for children and youth. By promoting PCEs and minimizing ACEs within your classroom, you can create a supportive learning environment that not only helps students excel academically but also equips them with the emotional and social tools necessary for navigating future challenges. The goal of this toolkit is to provide actionable activities and suggestions to educators to promote the key types of experiences all children need to thrive.

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HOPE Key Terms and Phrases

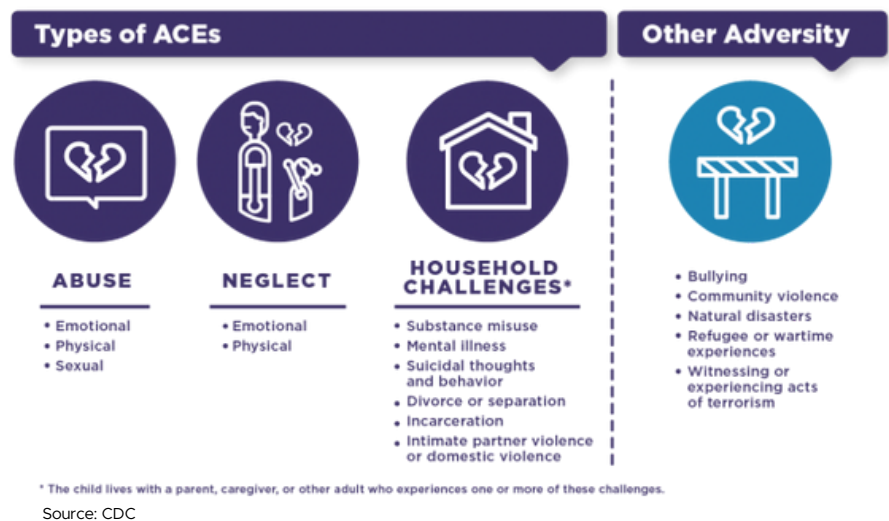
Welcome! If you are just learning about HOPE – Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences, we know that our acronyms and phrases may be new to you. We have broken down our key phrases here to help you better understand what HOPE is all about! If you ever have any questions, please contact us at hope@tuftsmedicalcenter.org.

HOPE

HOPE stands for Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences. We believe that all experiences, positive and negative, impact the brain and the body. We are dedicated to helping anyone expand access to the key types of positive experiences for children, families, and communities that promote health and well-being.

ACEs

ACEs are shorthand for Adverse Childhood Experiences. The **original study on ACEs** published in 1998 helped launch the field of trauma-informed care. The study paired with later research showed that trauma and adversity in childhood can have lasting impacts on the brain and body.



Community resilience looks like...



Source: Center for Community Resilience

PCEs

PCEs are key positive childhood experiences that children need to thrive and that lead to lifelong health and wellbeing. PCEs can positively influence child development even in the presence of adversity (ACEs).

Resources

PCEs Resources

Why positive childhood experiences are important for all children and families (HOPE Blog)

<https://positiveexperience.org/blog/why-pces-are-important-for-all-children-and-families>

10 Ways to Promote Positive Experiences (HOPE Resource)

<https://positiveexperience.org/resource/10-ways-to-promote-positive-experiences/>

The Resilience Tree (Center for Community Resilience)

<https://ccr.publichealth.gwu.edu/webinar-introducing-resilience-tree>

HOPE Framework Resources

HOPE as an Antiracism framework in action (HOPE Resource)

<https://positiveexperience.org/resource/hope-as-an-anti-racism-framework-in-action>

Four Ways to Assess Positive Childhood Experiences (HOPE Resource)

<https://positiveexperience.org/resource/four-ways-to-assess-positive-childhood-experiences>

HOPE-Informed screenings and assessments (HOPE Resource)

<https://positiveexperience.org/resource/hope-informed-screenings-and-assessments>

Hope-Informed supervision and leadership handout (HOPE Resource)

<https://positiveexperience.org/resource/hope-informed-supervision-and-leadership-handout>

Four Building Blocks of HOPE Resources

The Four Building of HOPE Fact Sheet (HOPE Resource)

<https://positiveexperience.org/resource/the-four-building-block-of-hope/>

The Four Building of HOPE Poster in Spanish/English (HOPE Resource):

<https://positiveexperience.org/resource/spanish-english-4-building-blocks-of-hope-poster/>

HOPE Framework

The HOPE framework is a strengths-based flexible approach to supporting children and families by prioritizing the promotion of equitable access to PCEs. The HOPE National Resource Center, HOPE trainers, and our partners work with child-serving agencies and entities from daycares and schools to child welfare, juvenile justice, public health, and healthcare (and everyone in between).

If you work with children, we want to help you create environments where you are actively cultivating health and well-being. This may include reviewing your organization's forms and policies, training your staff, or looking at your data to see what are your community's unique challenges your community faces. There are so many ways you can implement the HOPE framework in a way that feels meaningful to your community!

Four Building Blocks of HOPE

The Four Building Blocks of HOPE is an accessible way of talking about the key types of positive childhood experiences that promote health and well-being. The Building Blocks include:

- Safe and supportive relationships
- Safe, stable, equitable environments
- Opportunities for engagement
- Opportunities for emotional growth



HOPE National Resource Center

The **HOPE National Resource Center** (NRC) sees a world that honors and promotes positive experiences as necessary for health and well-being. The HOPE NRC aims to inspire a movement that changes how people and organizations advance health and well-being for children, families, and communities. We offer research, resources, and trainings and technical assistance centered around the HOPE framework and positive childhood experiences.

BRFSS

Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey Studies (BRFSS) are surveys conducted by each U.S. state with support of the CDC. Researchers call homes and ask adults questions about their demography, their current health and well-being, and their childhood. States, such as Wisconsin, Tennessee, and Montana, have begun asking questions about positive childhood experiences during their BRFSS studies and correlating those questions with adult health. From these BRFSS studies, the HOPE National Resource Center obtained crucial data on the impact of PCEs on adult health.

BRFSS Research on PCEs

Positive Childhood Experience and Adult Mental and Relational Health in a Statewide Sample (JAMA Pediatrics)

<https://positiveexperience.org/research/positive-childhood-experience-and-adult-mental-and-relational-health-in-a-statewide-sample/>

Associations Between Positive Childhood Experiences and Adult Smoking and Alcohol Use Behaviors in a Large Statewide Sample (Journal of Community Health)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10900-022-01155-8>

Positive Childhood Experiences among Tennesseans in 2021 Fact Sheet (Tennessee Department of Health)

<https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/health/documents/PCEs-Factsheet%202021.pdf>

ACEs Resources

Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults (American Journal of Preventive Medicine)

[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-3797\(98\)00017-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-3797(98)00017-8)

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention):

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/index.html>

The Pair of ACEs (Center for Community Resilience)

<https://ccr.publichealth.gwu.edu/tools-resources/the-BCR-approach>

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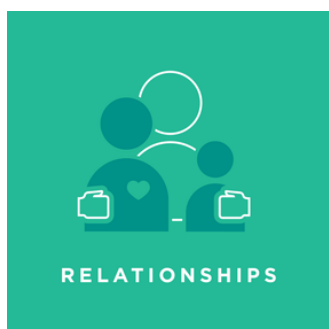
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The Four Building Blocks of HOPE

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?

- 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.
- Use the classroom space to support creativity and interaction.
- 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.



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?

- Encourage civic engagement and volunteering in your classroom.
- Have fliers in the classroom for community centers, after school activities, and mentoring programs in your community.
- Consider offering your own after-school opportunity to engage the children in your classroom.
- 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.

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. Identify or advocate for safe playgrounds for children in the community.

BRING HOPE TO THE CLASSROOM

When thinking about how to decorate your classroom and how to get to know your students, consider doing this in a HOPE-informed way. Below are 10 tips to add HOPE and the Four Building Blocks to your classroom before students even arrive. The environment building block is a large focus for these tips, but educators can practice each block and make them accessible to students. Children and youth spend most of their time in classrooms, and educators can promote strong relationships, safety and stability, engagement with the class, and offer space to grow – intellectually and emotionally.



Below is a check list of tips to help promote PCEs and the Four Building Blocks of HOPE in your classroom.

Check them off as you complete them, and add any of your own!

HOW TO PROMOTE PCEs

	Hang up posters and images throughout the classroom that show a diverse representation of background, ethnicity, and gender.
	Think about how you want students to sit. Arranging desks in clusters can promote new friendships and unstructured interactions.
	Use the four building blocks to guide questions that will help you and the other students get to know each other. Students have different experiences over the summer depending on the financial circumstance of their family.
	Find out if your school offers funding to have extra school supplies for any students who arrive without them? If not, is there a local organization you can reach out to?
	Think about how you want to introduce yourself to this new class. How can you make them feel welcome and comfortable? Is there a story you can share with them about your summer or a time when you started school, and how it made you feel?



HOW TO PROMOTE PCES

	Set up classroom norms for this new community of students and their families. One example is allowing fidget tools to help students pay attention when they may typically lose focus.
	Create classroom incentives, like a prizes for participating in PCEs. Look for ways to make this an equitable experience for students of all backgrounds and abilities to feel celebrated. Try creating milestones all students can reach or look for atypical achievements like a student who is trying and did not giving up.
	Make a chart of responsibilities, where students are responsible for a task. This will give them a sense of belonging, responsibility, and pride.
	Share your personality when setting up your classroom. Share your hobbies with your class, with posters from age-appropriate movies you like, or art that you have made. Help the students get to know you by sharing yourself with them.
	Encourage students to make an “all about me” book so that you can learn about their individual strengths, families, cultures, and needs in the classroom.



The Four Building Blocks of HOPE

are composed of key Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs)—and the sources of those experiences and opportunities—that help children grow into healthy, resilient adults.

Los Cuatro Pilares Fundamentales de HOPE

se componen de Experiencias Infantiles Positivas esenciales (PCE, por sus siglas en inglés)—y las fuentes de esas experiencias y oportunidades, que ayudan a los niños a convertirse en adultos sanos y resistentes.

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



Relaciones con la familia y con otros niños y adultos mediante actividades interpersonales.

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



Ambiente seguro, justo y estable en casa y en la escuela, para vivir, jugar y aprender.

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



Participación social y cívica para desarrollar un sentido de pertenencia y a relacionarse con otros.

Emotional growth through playing and interacting with peers for self-awareness and self-regulation.



Crecimiento emocional mediante el juego y la interacción con los compañeros, para el conocimiento de sí mismo y autorregulación emocional.



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11 WAYS TO HELP KIDS RETURN TO CALM

IN ‘THE MOMENT’

‘The Moment’ is something all kids (and adults) experience; it refers to a period of being emotionally overwhelmed, caused by intense feelings of anger, anxiety, or distress.

Understanding Emotional Regulation and Dysregulation in Children

When children face these overwhelming feelings in ‘the moment’, they may experience emotional dysregulation. This means their emotional response doesn’t match the situation. For example, a child might shout angrily because they can’t tie their shoes or hide under a desk and cry because they feel nervous about school. These are examples of dysregulated emotions. In contrast, emotional regulation is when children can manage their feelings and respond appropriately. Co-regulation happens when a supportive adult or peer helps a child calm down and regain control of their emotions. Please note that these strategies are general suggestions, each child is different, and depending on their maturity and cognitive ability the effectiveness of these tips will vary.



Signs of Emotional Dysregulation in Children Include:

Agitation: Clenching teeth, fidgeting excessively, shouting at peers or teachers, pacing, or slamming objects.

Fear or nervousness: Avoiding eye contact, frequent crying, withdrawing from activities, or clinging to adults.

Outbursts: Screaming, throwing tantrums, or physically acting out (hitting, kicking, or throwing objects).

Shutting Down: Refusing to speak, freezing in place, or hiding (under desks, behind furniture, etc.).

Difficulty Communicating: Using only gestures or one-word responses, or struggling to express what they feel.

Below are 11 strategies that teachers can use to help kids return to a calmer head space.

Preventing the Moment

These strategies can be employed anytime and should be done longitudinally to develop healthy habits that can help children build resilience and handle their emotions in a positive manner.

Give Children Autonomy

1

Recognizing that children oftentimes do not have control over most things in their lives is an important perspective to have. Giving kids autonomy in areas of the classroom that they care about can help them feel personally invested and responsible for their education and classroom. Examples of autonomy that teachers can give students include: helping draft and voting on classroom rules, creating a small part of the classroom curriculum, being responsible for weekly clean-up, watering the plants regularly, or feeding the class pet regularly.

Teach Active Listening

2

Kids often feel misunderstood by their peers, which can lead to frustration and bullying. Active listening is a communication skill that involves fully focusing on and responding to the speaker, and ultimately builds empathy. This involves not only listening to the speaker's words, but also paying attention to their body language, making eye contact, attending to whether the speaker is expressing big emotions, and slightly encouraging the speaker by nodding. Teach active listening by modeling it yourself, doing fun role-play activities among children, and providing positive reinforcement and constructive feedback.

3 Help children build strong connections and passions

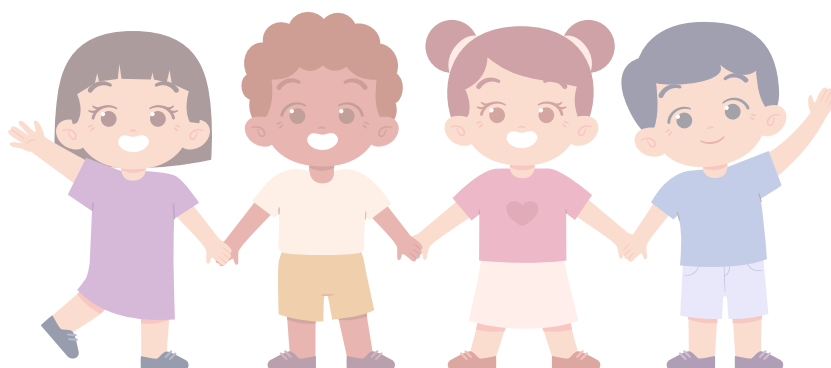
Kids often build their most impactful social connections outside of the daily classroom setting. Advocate for clubs and after school activities that kids want to pursue so that these positive experiences are more accessible to them!

4 Aid in Self Care

While many aspects of promoting self-care such as sleep hygiene, food stability, exposure to violence at home, and stable housing may be outside the control of a child, the importance of teaching about self care builds a sense of self-importance and resilience. Participate in activities such as making a ‘night kit’ which includes a sleep mask and lavender scents or developing a ‘fun exercise’ plan with games such as hop-skotch, tag, or sports.

5 The Value of Modeling Calmness Yourself

Children look to trusted adults for advice and support, both consciously and unconsciously. Modeling calmness yourself as a teacher will go leaps and bounds towards helping children in your classroom emotionally regulate when they are having a moment. For strategies on helping to self regulate as a teacher, read our ‘Teacher’s Regulation Fact Sheet’!



Before the Moment

You can not teach a child how to emotionally regulate themselves when they are at the height of their dysregulation.

Taking the temperature of the room

6

Recognize that kids come from diverse environments each and every day before they enter the classroom and thus harbor diverse emotional states from happy to sad to mad. Making space for emotional check-ins can be helpful to understand how kids are feeling that day. Do activities like daily feelings check-in that can give you some insight into the emotional state of the kids in your classroom.

During the Moment

Several strategies can be employed to help a child express their frustration in a less destructive and more positive manner when they are upset.

Allow Kids to Take Breaks

7

Emotional regulation takes time, and learning when emotionally dysregulated is near impossible. Recognizing this, give kids timely, easily accessible, and non-destructive strategies to calm down and become self aware when they are in a ‘fight or flight’ mode. For example, kids can push against a wall, crumple colored paper, do belly breathing, or go on a small walk (ideally with a classroom aid or support person).

8

Create a Calming Space for Children

A calming space allows children to emotionally regulate and feel safe. Examples are a cozy bean bag corner with sensory toys to self-regulate such as stuffed animals, stress balls, headphones with music, and other calming tools.

9

Help co-regulate

Children may not have the tools to calm down by themselves, so you can help them by co-regulating. This can involve things like giving them a warm hug, redirecting their attention to something calming like a serene picture or soothing music, or taking deep breaths. Each child is unique, so it is important to find the co-regulation strategy that is right for them.

After the Moment

Addressing moments of emotional dysregulation are important, but perhaps more important is making sure we do not focus on blame.

Teach children alternative choices they can make when they are upset

10

When we are angry or overwhelmed, we are in a fight, flight, or freeze mode and are not actively processing what is being said to us. Thus, it is useful to let kids know of more positive ways to express their frustration after they have regulated, such as tapping on a teacher's shoulder and asking to take a break before the dysregulation escalates. Keep in mind that this is a skill that takes time to develop.



11

Restoration Circles

Punishing a child and making them feel bad for their emotional dysregulation can be counterproductive and reinforce feelings of guilt and worthlessness. Help children develop problem-solving skills as well as self-worth by leading restorative circles. In these circles, have all children involved in the conflict participate and emphasize non-judgemental and non-accusatory language when each child speaks. Try to help children talk directly to each other and encourage them to use I statements such as: “I feel ____ because I think you _____. I wish _____.” As a teacher, practice positive affirmations and help the group come up with a shared solution that they all agree on.



HOW TO STAY CALM IN THE CLASSROOM DURING CONFLICT AND CHAOS

Staying calm during times of conflict and chaos in the classroom can be challenging. When we lose our cool it can escalate situations and make them worse. To better keep yourself grounded and calm during stressful moments there are steps to be taken before, during and after the conflict has arisen. Learn ways to stay regulated or recover from being dysregulated.

Definitions:

Dysregulated -the state of having trouble controlling your emotions and how you act on those feelings.

Regulated - able to experience strong emotions, not be overwhelmed by them, and positively act on them.

How to recognize when you are dysregulated:

- Heightened feeling of being overwhelmed or “on edge”
- Moody or irritable
- Easy to upset or anger

Helpful Tips:

- Be patient with yourself. These tools take a long time to learn. With practice you will begin to utilize them without realizing.
- No one is perfect. There are times where you will say the wrong thing or make a mistake, this is normal.

Resources:

- Managing Classroom Conflict
- “In the Moment” Coping Skills

Building capacity for calm before conflict or chaos arises:

1

Build a friendship with a colleague.

Having someone who works with you or in the same profession as you that you feel comfortable asking for help can aid us in externalizing our feelings and make sense of difficult situations.

Learn what triggers you and how it feels in your body.

We all have things that elicit strong emotions. It can come after something is said or an action by someone else. If we have a sense of what happens in our bodies when we are triggered we can begin to identify the signs that we may be getting dysregulated. For some people, this can feel like a racing heart, clenched fists, eyes welling up with tears, a tightened jaw, or an overwhelming feeling to escape or distract yourself. Take some time to understand how YOUR body experiences feeling triggered and dysregulated.

2

3

Learn coping strategies.

After you have noticed the things that trigger you, the next step is to be able to manage them. There are many coping skills we can utilize in moments of high stress and strong emotions. Being able to get ourselves grounded takes practice, and will not happen overnight. The more you practice different skills the better you will be able to utilize them when conflict arises in the classroom. These skills can range from deep breathing, feeling the ground beneath your feet, or squeezing a stress ball.

Co-create classroom norms/expectations.

Co-create a list of agreements with your class at the beginning of the school year or semester with your students. Setting these norms together will set clear expectations of how everyone is to treat each other and behavior within the classroom.

4

As conflict or chaos is arising:

5

Take a deep breath before responding.

If you have the time and space, ask for a moment and wait ten seconds before you respond, taking deep breaths. If you need to respond right away, try answering slowly with a soft voice. This slows down the interaction. The goal is to lower your heart rate and ultimately de-escalate the conflict.

Stay grounded in the present moment.

This is where coping mechanisms learned earlier will be helpful. As your heart rate increases and your mind starts to project worse case scenarios begin to use practices that help you stay grounded, level headed, and calm. This can look like putting your hand on your desk to feel something solid, or pausing for a bit longer between your words to slow down the interaction and your mind. There are many coping mechanisms, and finding the right ones can reduce stress, de-escalate situations more quickly, and help build positive relationships with your students.

6

7

Make space for the student to share their side of the story.

Meet with the student(s) privately for them to share why they were upset or acting out. Often our actions or reactions have little to do with what was said or our behavior, it is often something deeper. By asking questions and being curious we can help them move forward from the incident feeling better. Making space can be difficult when you are in the middle of a lesson. If there is space, ask the student(s) involved to talk in the hallway, or ask them to stay after class to debrief the incident. You can also practice restorative circles as described in our 11 Ways to Help Kids Calm Down In The Moment resource.

Notice what emotions are coming up for you.

Are you getting angry, defensive, anxious, or aggravated? Maybe you feel hurt or burnt out? As feelings arise it is important to acknowledge them. This can be done in the moment or after the height of the conflict is over. Emotions can control the way we view a situation and cloud our judgment. Being able to understand what we are feeling can help us find empathy for ourselves and others. Try to sit with the feeling and not distract yourself from it, really pay attention to what you are feeling. When we are quiet and listen we can learn that often there is more than one emotion we are feeling.

8

Reflecting and repairing after conflict:

Say sorry if needed.

Apologizing helps the person we may have offended and it helps us as well. Uncomfortable interactions can leave us with feelings of shame that can often make the situation worse. When we own up to our mistakes and apologize, we can fully resolve the conflict and strengthen our relationships. We also model for children that it's ok to make mistakes and what it can look like to take responsibility for your actions.

9

Take time to reflect.

Sit with yourself after the conflict. Maybe you were not able to regulate yourself in the moment and need to calm down in the aftermath. Or maybe you were able to remain calm during the conflict and need time to reflect on the feelings that arose and clarify what happened in the situation. Making space for healing and clarity can help repair relationships and move forward in a positive and constructive way. Journaling is one technique to help us process, writing things down makes them feel more real, tangible, and helps us make sense of our emotions as well as the situation.

10

Engaging Youth around the Four Building Blocks



We strongly encourage educators to share the concept of the Four Building Blocks with children and youth. For youth who have experienced trauma and adversity, they've often developed a sense of shame around their past. They may have received messages (subtly or intentionally) that something is wrong with them or they are in some way broken. Learning about HOPE can provide a sense of optimism for the future. Additionally, we know all children, regardless of trauma exposure, need the Four Building Blocks to thrive. One way to share HOPE with youth is through the following activity.

1. Present the concept of HOPE to students (potentially during a Health and Wellness class or SEL time). You can share the [brief intro video](#) or create your own slides! The goal is to let students know that our brains and bodies respond to ALL experiences, good and bad! The more positive experiences we have, the better our health is all the way through the lifespan.
2. Hang four pieces of large paper around the room labeled with the Building Blocks (Relationships, Environments, Engagement, Emotional Growth).



RELATIONSHIPS



ENVIRONMENT



ENGAGEMENT

EMOTIONAL
GROWTH



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3. Have students rotate around the room and write the formal and informal ways they access each of the Building Blocks on the associated paper.
4. Come back together as a group and debrief
 - A. What Building Blocks feel easiest to access?
 - B. What Building Blocks have fewer resources?
 - C. Who might have a harder time accessing the Building Blocks?
5. If students are interested, you might have them consider coming up with a list of recommendations for school administrators about ways they want to see more access to the Building Blocks at school. This serves two purposes: it helps create more access to the Building Blocks for the kids in your community AND it gives youth an opportunity for engagement!

Have fun with it! This can be a great way to get youth engaged with creating more access to PCEs for themselves and their community.





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Four Building Blocks of HOPE Worksheets

[Building Blocks Questionnaire Worksheets](#)

These three worksheets break down the building blocks and ask specific questions to help understand a child or youth's experience with each block. Use these forms to help children and youth see the positive in their lives and help you get to know them better.

*This resource was made by Pediatrician, Dr. Gretchen Pianka.

[Strength Based Building Block Conversations](#)

This resource offers topics and talking points to guide conversations around each building block. Use this tool to help explore ways for children and youth to experience PCEs.

*This resource was made by Pediatrician, Dr. Gretchen Pianka.

[Building Blocks of HOPE Interactive Worksheet](#)

Children and youth can choose to write or draw their experiences with each building block. This can be given out as an activity during class, or as something students work on in their free time.

*This resource was made in collaboration with the Boston Tufts Pediatrics Clinic.

Building Blocks for Health

These four building blocks are important factors in growing up healthy. Share what's working & your provider will brainstorm with you for solutions to anything that not working.

Engagement:

What is one thing you like to do as a family outside the home?
Where do you feel most connected to others?

Environment:

Describe a place you love to go or play. Where is your safe space?

Relationships:

What do you like to do at home with your family? Who is someone outside your family that really cares about you?

Emotional Health:

What feelings do you talk about at home? Who can you talk about feelings with? How can you take care of yourself when you have big feelings?

Build a Tower of Blocks!

These four building blocks are important factors in growing up healthy. Share what's working & your provider will brainstorm with you for solutions to anything that not working.

Engagement:
What do you like to do as a family outside the home? Where do you feel connected to others? Describe a favorite outing.

Relationships:
What do you like to do at home with your family? Who outside your family would always help you if you needed something?

Environment:
Describe places you love to go. Where do you like to play? Describe your safe space(s). What is your favorite place in your home? Outside your home?

Emotional Health:
What feelings do you talk about at home? Who can you talk about feelings with? How can you take care of yourself when you don't feel good?

Healthy Building Blocks

These four building blocks are important factors in growing up healthy. Share what's working & your provider will brainstorm with you for solutions to anything that not working.

Engagement:

What is your favorite sport or activity?

Describe a favorite outing.

Where do you feel connected to others?

What do you like to do as a family outside the home?

Relationships:

What do you like to do at home with your family?

What is your favorite book or movie?

Which family story are you proud of?

Who outside your family would always help you if you needed something?

Environment:

Describe places you love to go. Where do you like to play?

Describe your safe space(s).

What is your favorite place in your home?

What is your favorite place outside your home?

Emotional Health:

Who can you talk about feelings with?

How do you take care of yourself when you feel hungry?

How do you take care of yourself when you feel sad?

What always helps you feel better when you feel yucky?

Strengths Based Building Block Conversations

Engagement:

- Suggest afterschool programs
- Explore summer camps, community programs
- Identify local YMCA - can they connect? Scholarships? Transportation Barriers?
- Parenting resources – positive parenting resources, community groups
- Youth programs, outreach, school, community groups
- Offer list of local churches or spiritual centers, resources
- Identify parent support groups – online or in person

Environment:

- Provide list of local housing resources
- Provide list of food pantries
- Provide list of transportation options
- Review Gun safety
- Review Medication safety
- Brainstorm about safe play areas
- Brainstorm about options for trips, outings
- Offer list of community resources for outdoor activities
- Trail/Park Maps and resources (i.e. state park passes or maps)

Relationships:

- How are things at home? What is hard for parents?
- Are parents able to play with kids, Read?
- What is parent proud of?
- How high is the stress level at home?
- Are there specific things or times of day that are hardest?
- Name the non-parent adults that can help; identify barriers to asking them for help
- Identify community resources that can reduce barriers/decrease isolation
- Provide list of community groups and supports
- Give Reach out and Read books/library resources

Emotional Health:

- Ask parents if they feel like they know how to help their child when they are angry, frustrated, worried or scared
- Ask parents how they take care of themselves when they are stressed, sad, angry or frustrated
- Make a “Family Feelings Chart” & encourage them to ask “how do I know I am feeling this way” & “how can I take care of myself while this feeling is here?”
- Teach at least one breathing exercise (glitter jar, box breathing or 5 big deep breaths)
- Teach one strategy for anger (playing “angry” ball with nerf ball, Daniel Tiger, outside to run around)
- Teach one mindfulness strategy: i.e. toes-to-nose or using all 5 senses

Building Blocks of HOPE

These four Building Blocks can help you grow up healthy. In each box, draw or write about how you fill each of your buckets!

Relationships:

Who is someone outside of your family that really cares about you?

Environment:

Describe a place you love to go and have fun?

Engagement:

What is your favorite sport or activity?

Emotional Growth:

Who can you talk to about your feelings?
How do you take care of yourself when you're not feeling your best?



HEALTHY OUTCOMES™
FROM POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

Positive Childhood Experiences Literature Review

Title: Understanding and Promoting Resilience in the Context of Adverse Childhood Experiences

Building Blocks: Environment and Emotional Growth

Link: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10643-017-0869-3>

Summary: Early childhood educators can help promote resilience from ACEs by helping children build socioemotional capacities, assisting them in developing secure attachments and connectedness, and building a protective school community.

Title: Positive Childhood Experiences Promote School Success

Building Block: Engagement

Link: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10995-021-03206-3>

Summary: Participation in after-school activities, which is a type of engagement PCE, was associated with lower school absenteeism and lower repeating of grades.

Title: Adverse Childhood Experiences and Protective Factors With School Engagement

Building Blocks: Relationships and Environment

Link: <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article-abstract/144/2/e20182945/76877/Adverse-Childhood-Experiences-and-Protective>

Summary: PCEs, including the neighborhood environment and family factors, were protective factors that improved school performance and attitudes, and mitigated the negative effects of ACEs.



HEALTHY OUTCOMES™
FROM POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

Positive Childhood Experiences Literature Review

Title: Trauma-Informed Care in Early Childhood Education Settings: A Scoping Literature Review

Building Blocks: Relationships and Environment

Link: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10643-023-01596-3>

Summary: Early childhood education settings can be trauma-informed by building relationships with caregivers and children, creating a supportive classroom environment—both of which are PCEs—and implementing program-wide practices.

Title: Adolescent Connectedness and Adult Health Outcomes

Building Blocks:

Link: <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article-abstract/144/1/e20183766/37106/Adolescent-Connectedness-and-Adult-Health-Outcomes?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

Summary: School connectedness in adolescence was protective against negative adult outcomes, including emotional distress, suicidal ideation, physical violence victimization and perpetration, STI diagnosis, prescription drug misuse, and other illicit drug use.

Title: Risk and protective factors for childhood suicidality: a US population-based study

Building Blocks: Environment and Engagement

Link: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366\(20\)30049-3/abstract](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366(20)30049-3/abstract)

Summary: Positive school involvement reduced the risk of child-reported suicidality for 9–10-year-olds.

PCE Literature Review

Title: The longitudinal influences of adverse childhood experiences and positive childhood experiences at family, school, and neighborhood on adolescent depression and anxiety

Building Block: Relationships

Link: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S016503272100553X>

Summary: PCEs at school, including school connectedness and positive peer relationships, were protective for at-risk youth from anxiety and depression.

Title: Examining Bullying Victimization, Bullying Perpetration, and Positive Childhood Experiences

Building Blocks: Relationships and Environment

Link: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/josh.13323>

Summary: PCEs—such as having a resilient family and living in a safe and supportive neighborhood—were associated with lower odds of bullying victimization and bullying perpetration.

Title: Associations of Social Capital with Mental Disorder Prevalence, Severity, and Comorbidity among U.S. Adolescents

Building Block: Engagement

Link: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15374416.2021.1875326>

Summary: School bonding was associated with lower mood, anxiety, behavior, substance use, and eating disorders. This effect was the strongest for substance use disorders and behavior disorders. Those with higher levels of extracurricular participation were also less likely to have a substance use disorder.



HEALTHY OUTCOMES™
FROM POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

PCE Literature Review

Title: Predicting 3-month risk for adolescent suicide attempts among pediatric emergency department patients

Building Blocks: Environment and Engagement

Link: https://acamh.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/jcpp.13087?saml_referrer#

Summary: For adolescents with a history of suicidal thoughts, a greater feeling of school connectedness was associated with lower risk of future suicide attempt.

Title: Teen Dating Violence Perpetration: Protective Factor Trajectories from Middle to High School among Adolescents

Building Blocks: Relationships, Environment, and Engagement

Link: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6895399/>

Summary: A sense of belonging at school was protective against becoming a perpetrator of teen dating violence.

Title: Investigating Protective Factors Associated With Mental Health Outcomes in Sexual Minority Youth

Building Blocks: Relationships

Link: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1054139X21004961>

Summary: Experiencing school connectedness and having caring teachers was protective against negative mental health outcomes in young adulthood for sexual minority identifying youth.



HEALTHY OUTCOMES™
FROM POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

PCE Literature Review

Title: The Protective Role of Connectedness on Depression and Suicidal Ideation Among Bully Victimized Youth

Building Blocks: Relationships and Engagement

Link: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/10.1080/15374416.2018.1443456>

Summary: For youth who have been victimized by bullying, school connectedness was associated with lower depression and suicidal ideation.

Title: Family, School, and Peer Support Are Associated With Rates of Violence Victimization and Self-Harm Among Gender Minority and Cisgender Youth

Building Block: Relationships

Link: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1054139X19303787>

Summary: School support was associated with lower odds of nonsuicidal self-injury and experiencing dating violence.

Title: Teachers and Coaches in Adolescent Social Networks Are Associated With Healthier Self-Concept and Decreased Substance Use

Building Block: Relationships

Link: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/josh.12462>

Summary: Students who perceived more support from their teacher had lower odds of drug use and had better academic and behavioral self-concepts.



HEALTHY OUTCOMES™
FROM POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

PCE Literature Review

Title: Associations Between School Connection and Depressive Symptoms From Adolescence Through Early Adulthood: Moderation by Early Adversity

Building Block: Relationships

Link: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/jora.12275?saml_referrer

Summary: Youth that report greater school connectedness also report fewer depressive symptoms, and this extends even into early adulthood, over 10 years after the connectedness was originally measured.

Title: Understanding the Linkages Between Parental Monitoring, School Academic Engagement, Substance Use, and Suicide Among Adolescents in U.S.

Building Blocks: Engagement

Link: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10566-020-09570-5>

Summary: School academic engagement—measured by feelings of meaningfulness and importance about schoolwork and the things learned in school, interest in courses at school, and encouragement from a teacher—was associated with lower substance use.