



The Four Building Blocks of HOPE for Parks and Recreation

Cultivating Positive Experiences for Lifelong Health

We know that our brains and our bodies respond to all kinds of experiences. Research shows that positive childhood experiences (PCEs) help children grow into healthy, resilient adults. And these PCEs are effective in promoting healing and thriving even after trauma has occurred. These PCEs are powerful public health contributors, and they've shown to improve health outcomes across age, race and ethnicity, sex, and geographic location. PCEs also:

- Reduce the risk of adult diabetes, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), cancer, asthma, and heart disease;
- Increase adult incomes;
- Improve adult mental health; and
- Reduce substance use across the lifespan

PCEs also save money! People with 3 or more PCEs saved their state approximately \$28,000 annually from reduced need costly health, behavioral health, justice, and treatment services.

What is HOPE?

The Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences (HOPE) framework centers around the key types of PCEs children and youth need to thrive, which HOPE refers to as the Four Building Blocks. The Building Blocks include:

- Safe relationships with adults and peers
- Safe environments to live, learn, and play where children and youth have access to their basic needs and are physically and emotionally safe
- Opportunities for engagement and a sense of belonging
- Opportunities for emotional growth.



These Building Blocks aren't just for children! They are shown to be effective across the lifespan.

How HOPE intersects with Parks and Rec activities

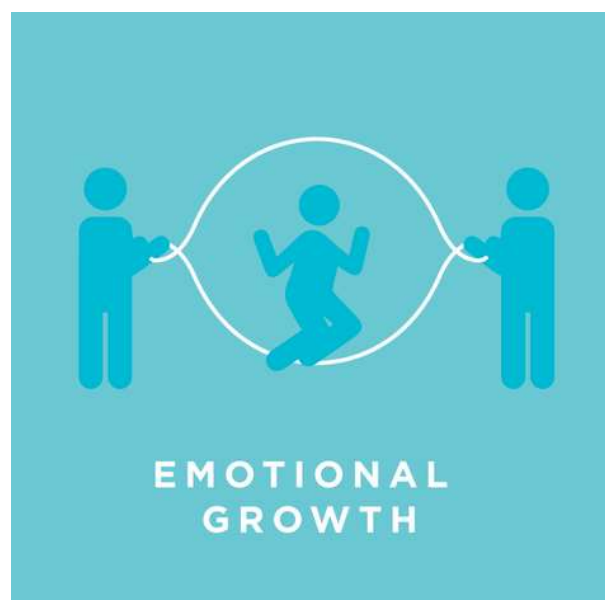
This resource is designed to help Parks and Recreation departments increase access to the Building Blocks for members of their community through built environments. Physical spaces to learn, laugh, play, and move have the potential to provide access to all four of the HOPE Building Blocks for children, youth, and adults. Keep reading to learn how your Parks and Recreation Department can create intentional spaces that prioritize the HOPE Building Blocks.

Relationships



- Create welcoming, low-pressure spaces where people can gather, connect, and build relationships (parks, trails, dog parks, playgrounds, skate parks, and public gathering spaces).
- Offer opportunities for meaningful connection among people who share common interests, experiences, cultures, or life stages (parent and baby meetups, LGBTQ+ nights, teen movie nights, walking groups, etc.).
- Support intergenerational connections among children, youth, adults, and older adults through shared activities and events.
- Design spaces that encourage conversation, collaboration, and informal relationship-building.
- Train staff and volunteers to create welcoming, inclusive environments where all community members feel seen and valued.

Emotional Growth



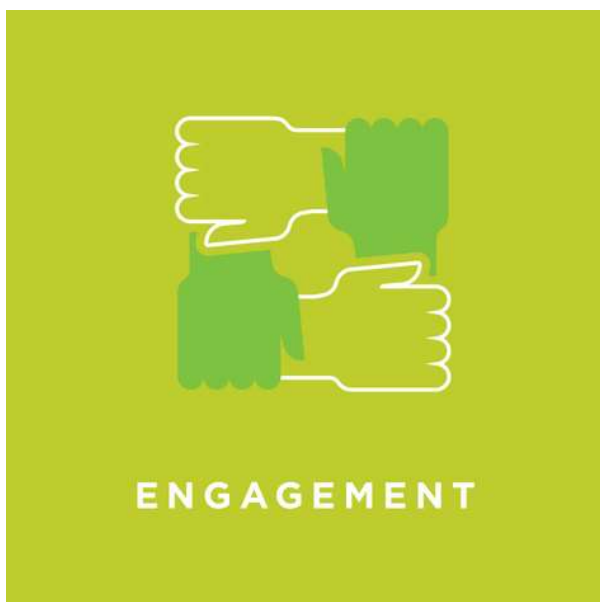
- Promote opportunities for creative expression through art, music, storytelling, and cultural traditions.
- Provide opportunities for exploration, curiosity, and unstructured play.
- Offer activities that help participants develop confidence, resilience, decision making skills, and leadership abilities.
- Create spaces for reflection, mindfulness, and restoration through trails, gardens, natural areas, and quiet spaces.
- Celebrate individual and community accomplishments through events, recognition programs, and exhibitions.

Environments



- Use surveys, focus groups, and community conversations to gather input and ensure community voices help shape decisions.
- Ensure spaces are accessible for members of differing abilities (accessible playgrounds, wheelchair-friendly trails, braille on signs, etc.).
- Promote welcoming environments where people of all backgrounds, cultures, and abilities feel a sense of belonging.
- Host resource events in community spaces to help meet basic needs like farmers markets, community gardens, food libraries, and healthy food distribution events.
- Include bulletin boards with information about local resources.
- Increase equitable access to parks, trails, nature-based spaces, and recreation opportunities throughout the community.
- Incorporate natural elements such as trees, gardens, water features, and outdoor learning spaces that support well-being, learning and exploration.

Engagement



- Provide volunteer days for clean-ups, community projects, and park maintenance.
- Consider a youth advisory council to manage activities in public spaces.
- Invite community members, including parents, caregivers, and youth, to help shape programs, events, and future park improvements.
- Support community-led events, festivals, cultural celebrations, and neighborhood gatherings.
- Create leadership opportunities for youth through planning, service projects, mentoring, and recreation programs.
- Create opportunities for community members to participate in community gardens, farmers markets, food-growing projects, and local food initiatives.
- Encourage community stewardship and pride through gardening projects, trail maintenance, conservation activities, and beautification efforts

Every park, trail, playground, recreation program, and community event is an opportunity for positive experiences that support lifelong health and well-being. By intentionally designing spaces and programs that promote relationships, safe environments, engagement, and emotional growth, Parks and Recreation departments can help build healthier, more connected, and more resilient communities.