

# DART Prevention Coalition

## POSITIVE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (PCEs)

In January,  
DART is  
focusing on  
Positive  
Childhood  
Experiences!



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Taking Aim at Substance Use in Ocean County

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**PCEs AS PREVENTION ONE-PAGER**



# Positive Childhood Experiences – Building Healthy Futures Together



Children thrive when they feel safe, supported and well connected. Research tells us that Positive Childhood Experiences, otherwise known as PCEs, can lower the impacts of adversity and long-term health risks while strengthening resiliency. By intentionally creating environments where youth feel valued and included, communities can play a vital role in lowering substance use, reducing mental health challenges and promoting overall well-being.

## What are PCEs?

PCEs are the everyday experiences, interactions, supports and opportunities that impact how a child grows. Some examples of PCEs are:

- Stable Relationships with Adults - Any relationship with trusted adults, including parents, teachers, mentors, extended family or other community members
- Connectedness - Through relationships with peers, school or other community organizations
- Access to Learning Opportunities - Both academic and social opportunities
- Safety - At home, school or in the community, and ideally in all areas
- Belonging - Having their voices heard, feeling included and being part of decisions that impact them
- Traditions and Cultural Practices - Helps build personal identity and personal pride

## PCEs as Prevention

Incorporating PCEs into prevention practices that support youth can promote healthier individuals and communities. By shifting the focus to address the root cause of negative outcomes for youth, known as an upstream approach, you can support positive areas that help strengthen protective factors, boost emotional regulation and lower the likelihood of youth engaging in high-risk behaviors. Ensuring that youth have PCEs helps create safe, connected communities.

Some concrete practices you can implement to support PCEs for the youth in your life include:

- **Building strong, supportive relationships with the youth in your life.** You can do this by being honest, offering encouragement, modeling healthy communication, listening and checking in frequently.
- **Valuing belonging and inclusion.** When you are in youth-centered spaces, such as home, school or extracurricular activities, make sure you are creating an environment where youth feel seen, valued and included.
- **Encouraging skill building.** Support youth trying new things; this can increase feelings of confidence and resiliency.
- **Strengthening community supports.** Collaborate with youth and youth-serving organizations on initiatives that work to create an environment of support and safety.

Supporting and encouraging PCEs can be as simple as consistently showing up and engaging with youth in meaningful, honest ways. When families, community organizations and schools work together to nurture children, we reduce risk and build healthier futures for everyone.

[rwjbh.org/DARTresources](http://rwjbh.org/DARTresources)

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**PCEs BASICS ONE-PAGER**



# Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs)



## What are Adverse Childhood Experiences?

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are traumatic or stressful events, such as abuse, neglect or household dysfunction, that negatively impact a child's development. These experiences can lead to long-term physical, emotional and behavioral challenges and influence health outcomes over time.

## What are Positive Childhood Experiences?

Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) are supportive and nurturing interactions and environments that promote healthy emotional and cognitive development for children. These experiences can help buffer the harmful effects of adverse childhood experiences by fostering resilience, building strong relationships and providing a foundation for positive mental health and coping skills.

## The Four Building Blocks of Positive Childhood Experiences

A 2017 paper, "Responding to ACEs With HOPE: Health Outcomes From Positive Experiences," written by Dr. Robert Sege and Dr. Charlyn Harper Brown, established four building blocks of positive childhood experiences:

- 1. Relationships:** Positive relationships in a child's life such as a healthy bond between parent and baby, positive relationships with other trusted adults and relationships with peers.
- 2. Environment:** Having a safe, stable and protective environment in which children can live, learn and play. This includes adequate housing, access to nutritious foods and access to quality education.
- 3. Engagement:** Having a connection to the community is important. Children should feel that they belong and that they matter to the people and community around them.
- 4. Opportunities for social and emotional growth:** Children need to have the space to develop social and emotional competencies, which allows them to navigate adversity and challenges.

*Source: Responding to ACEs With HOPE: Health Outcomes from Positive Experiences - PubMed*

## Positive Childhood Experiences as Protective Factors

Protective factors are conditions that help individuals cope with stress and adversity, reducing the impact of risks, challenges or negative behaviors.

## Steps to Help Build Positive Childhood Experiences

- Form strong relationships and meaningful connections
- Cultivate positive self-image and self-worth
- Create a sense of belonging
- Share information about after-school activities where children can connect with coaches, mentors or peers
- Teach skills to cope with stress in healthy ways
- Talk, sing, read and play with your children to help them learn
- Establish routines and structure
- Engage children in family tasks and social connections

To learn more about strengthening protective factors in your community, email [dart@rwjbh.org](mailto:dart@rwjbh.org).

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**PCEs can lower the impacts of adversity, lower long-term health risks and strengthen resiliency.**



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## PCEs include:

- Stable relationships with adults
- Connectedness and belonging
- Access to learning opportunities
- Safety



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