



DART Prevention Coalition
Taking Aim at Substance Use in Ocean County

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.