

# Understanding PCEs

## Positive Childhood Experiences

### What are PCEs?

Positive childhood experiences (PCEs) are the activities and experiences that shape a youth's life, development and future health. The PCEs shown below help youth be more resilient, succeed in school, and have better health outcomes. Youth who had six or seven of these PCEs had four times lower prevalence of depression and poor mental health in adulthood than those with only two or less. What's more, a John Hopkins University study showed PCEs counter the damaging effects of adverse experiences.

#### In the home youth...

talk with family members about their feelings



feel safe and protected by an adult in their home



feel that their families stood by them during difficult times



#### In the community youth...



feel supported by friends



have at least two non-parent adults who take genuine interest in them



feel a sense of belonging in high school



enjoy participating in community traditions



Image credit: pngwave.com and nounproject.com

Some children live in homes where they don't feel emotionally and physically safe. The good news is that friends and communities can be sources of PCEs as well. "If your child has experienced trauma and you're worried about the long-term impact it could have on them, these findings show that the positive experiences in childhood lead to better adult physical and mental health, no matter what they have faced," said Ali Crandall, assistant professor of public health at Brigham Young University.

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The types of experiences that have the most healing effects are not things that can be bought or that cost a lot of money. Youth need experiences that help them learn to trust others even when life is uncertain, difficult or frightening. Positive things happen when we talk honestly about things that are hard to understand, scary, embarrassing or painful.

## ***Tips for Nurturing PCEs at Home with Adolescents***

Adolescence is a time of remarkable change and growth for pre-teens, teens and young adults.

### **Talking with Family Members about Feelings**

- Maintain regular check-ins
- Nurture a space to explore thoughts, feelings and concerns
- Express love frequently
- Talk with teens while driving, cooking or during other preferred activity
- Listen deeply and nonjudgmentally
- Acknowledge when challenging emotions arise
- Ask for their opinions on community issues and family matters
- Talk about and celebrate their strengths, skills and efforts (and do so in front of them and others)
- Work through problems and stressors together



### **Feeling Safe and Protected**

- Keep your word
- Prioritize time to connect
- Be clear about your expectations
- Model appropriate apologies
- Allow them to set boundaries
- Discuss what to do if something seems “off” or feels uncomfortable
- Model and teach assertiveness skills
- Take physical and emotional boundary violations seriously
- Teach them to seek help when needed

### **Feeling Family Stands By You in Difficulty**

- Acknowledge when situations are stressful
- Ask what they’re concerned about and listen without judgment
- Help them learn to set boundaries and practice self-care
- Affirm that you love and care about them
- If they have done something wrong, support them in making a plan to correct the problem
- Help them build empathy
- Express pride in them when they take responsibility and follow through on correcting an error
- Refrain from ‘would have’ and ‘should have’ lectures
- Use difficult times as opportunities for growth - talk about what can be learned from challenging circumstances

### **Promoting Community PCEs**

- Empower them to try new things and explore their passions
- Encourage their desire to contribute, question, or challenge things to improve their community
- Give opportunities to learn and practice social skills
- Provide consistent and loving support as they explore friendships and community connections
- Expect there will be challenging times in their friendships and relationships and help them stay grounded in their values
- Connect them with trusted adults who are positive influences
- Share traditions that create a sense of belonging in the school



### **Resources:**

**Positive Childhood Experiences** - [www.childandadolescent.org/positive-childhood-experiences](http://www.childandadolescent.org/positive-childhood-experiences)

**Social, Emotional & Character Development (SECD) Standards: What Families Need to Know** - <https://bit.ly/36zeQpt>