



# 2026 Conference

*Context & Connection: Reframing Childhood Adversity*

## Breakout Session One

How Experiences Shape Our Health - and How  
Connections Help Us Heal

*Presenters: Zoe Lyons, Hilary Marine, Debra Wertz*

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# How Experiences Shape Our Health - and How Connections Help Us Heal

Zoe Lyons, Hilary Marine, Debra Wertz

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## Objectives

1. Understand what ACEs are and how life experiences can affect long-term health
2. Recognize what PCEs are and how they promote health, healing and resilience
3. Identify simple ways to support well-being through connection and care

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## Acronyms - what do those letters mean?

ACEs - Adverse Childhood Experiences

PCEs - Positive Childhood Experiences

PACEs - sometimes used to talk about both positive and adverse experiences

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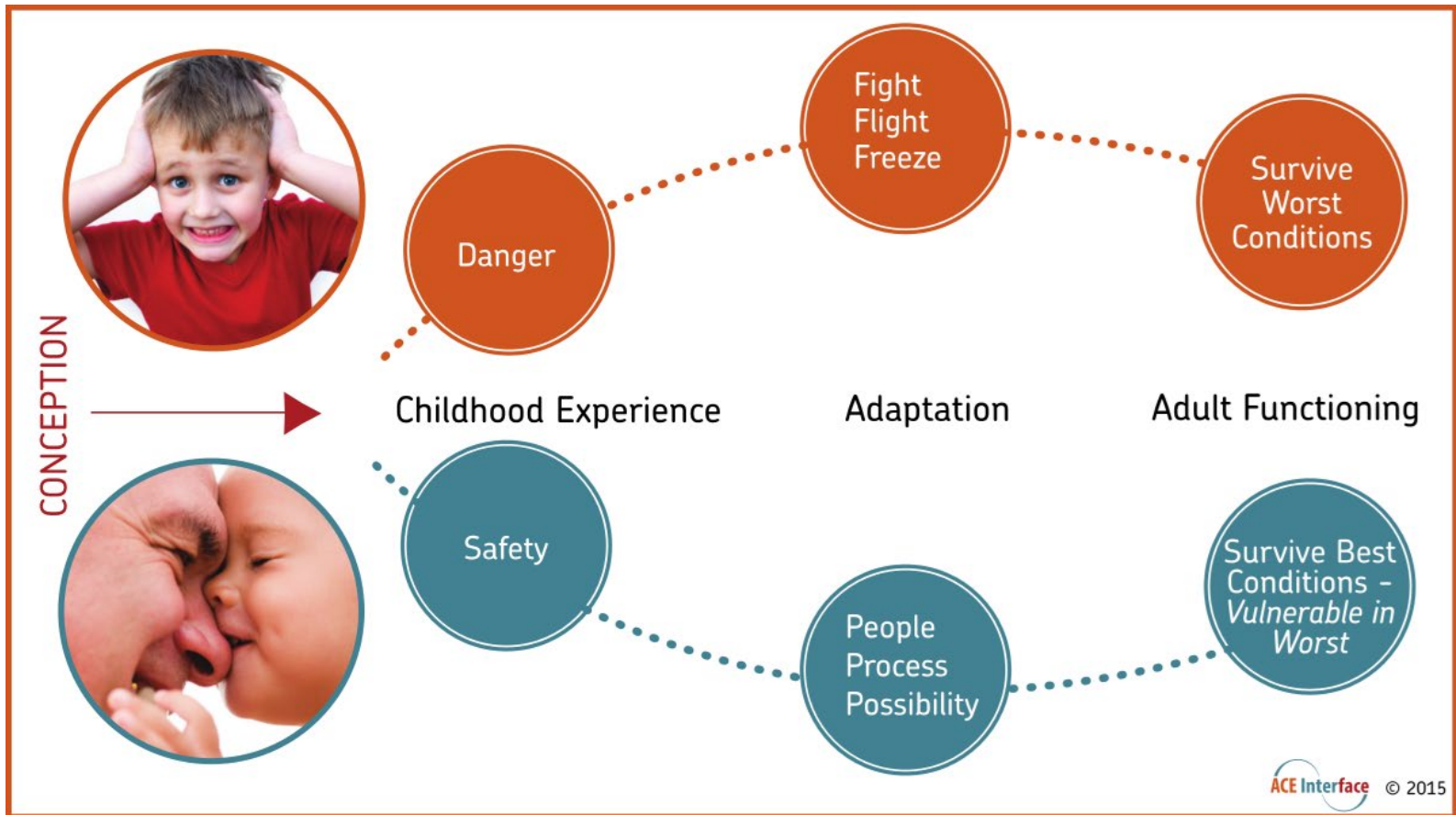


**Building Self-Healing  
Communities**



**UNDERSTANDING**  
Adverse Childhood Experiences

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01/12/14

**NEWS**

## **Early Adversity Increases Physical, Mental, Behavioral Problems, Scientists Report**

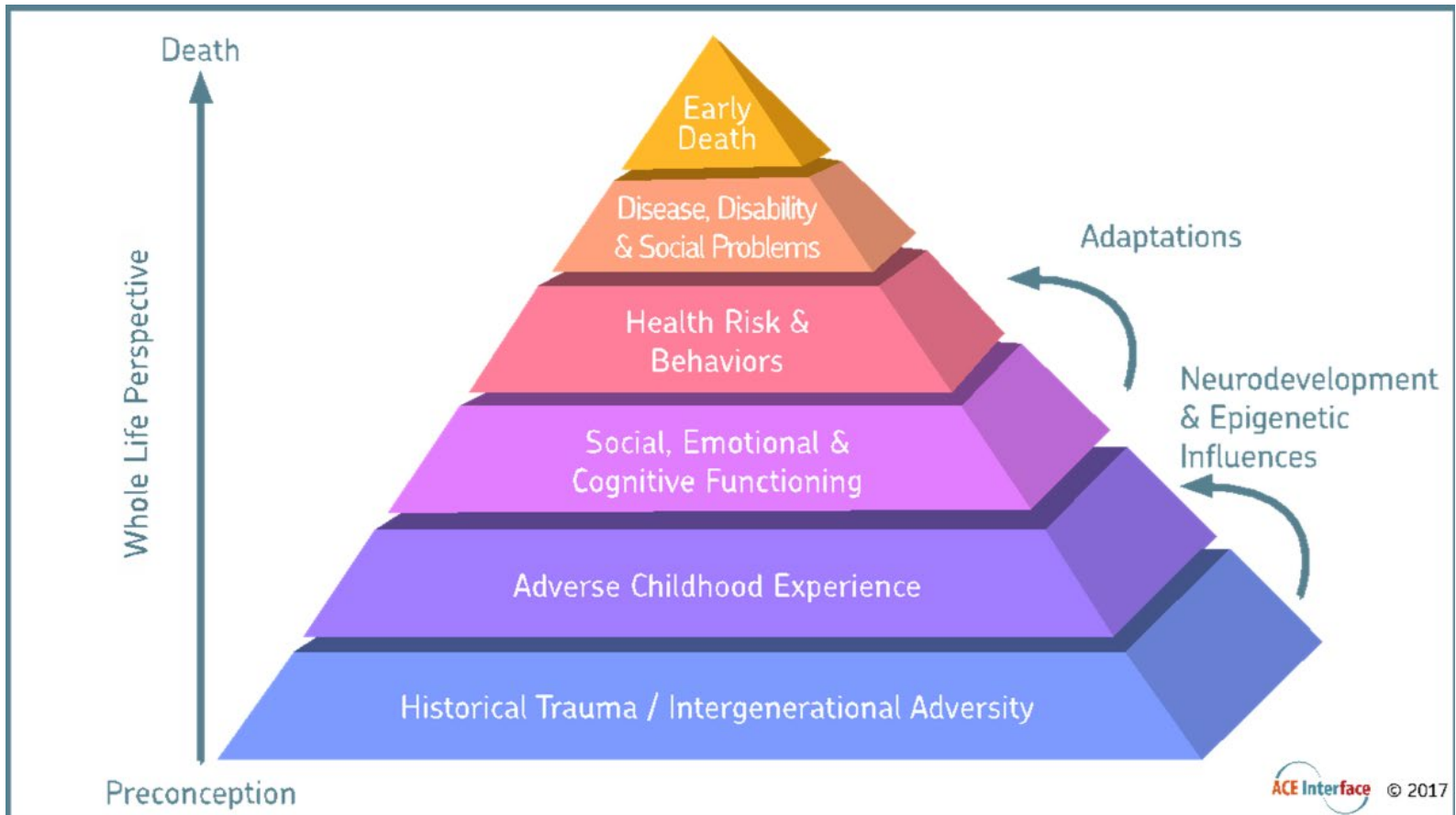


**Dr. Robert Anda & Dr. Vincent Felitti**  
Investigators

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention,  
Kaiser Permanente Study

Over 17,000 study participants

The ACE Study confirms, with scientific evidence, that adversity early in life increases physical, mental and behavioral problems later in life.



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# Adverse Childhood Experiences ARE COMMON

## Household Dysfunction

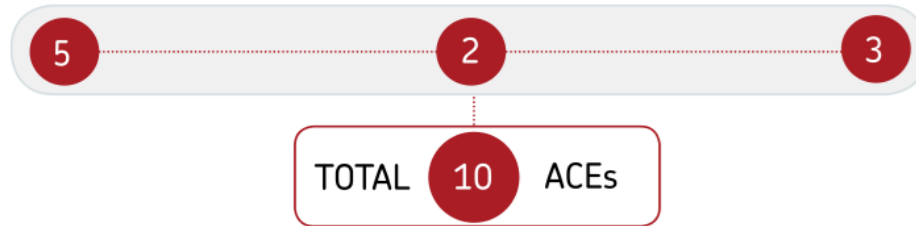
Substance Abuse	27%
Parental Sep/Divorce	23%
Mental Illness	17%
Battered Mothers	13%
Criminal Behavior	6%

## Neglect

Emotional	15%
Physical	10%

## Abuse

Emotional	11%
Physical	28%
Sexual	21%





## Bullying



# ACE Concepts Over Time

1994

CDC-Kaiser Study

10 ACEs

1. Emotional abuse
2. Physical abuse
3. Sexual abuse
4. Parent separation/divorce
5. Incarcerated household member
6. Person in household was a problem drinker, alcoholic or used street drugs
7. Exposed to violence against mother
8. Mentally ill, suicidal, depressed household member
9. Physical neglect
10. Emotional neglect

2009

U.S. Surveillance (BRFSS)

8 ACEs

1. Emotional abuse
2. Physical abuse
3. Sexual abuse
4. Parent separation/divorce
5. Incarcerated household member
6. Person in household was a problem drinker, alcoholic or used street drugs
7. Exposed to violence among parents or adults in one's home
8. Mentally ill, suicidal, depressed household member

2010

Global Surveillance (WHO ACE-IQ)

18 ACEs

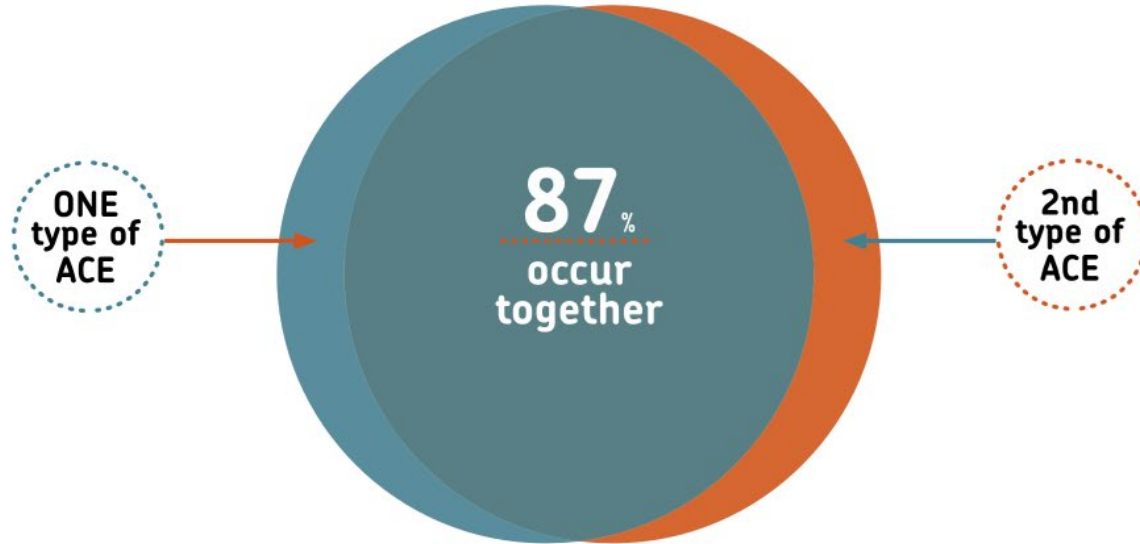
1. Emotional abuse
2. Physical abuse
3. Sexual abuse
4. Parent separation/divorce
5. Incarcerated household member
6. Person in household was problem drinker, alcoholic, misused street or prescription drugs
7. Exposed to violence or emotional abuse against parent or household member
8. Mentally ill, suicidal, depressed household member
9. Physical neglect
10. Emotional neglect
11. Parent or guardian death
12. Peer bullying
13. Exposure to peer violence
14. Exposure to sibling physical violence
15. Exposure to sibling emotional violence
16. Forced marriage
17. Witnessing violence in neighborhood, school
18. Exposure to collective violence (wars, terrorism, political or ethnic conflicts, genocide, repression, disappearances, torture and organized violent crime)



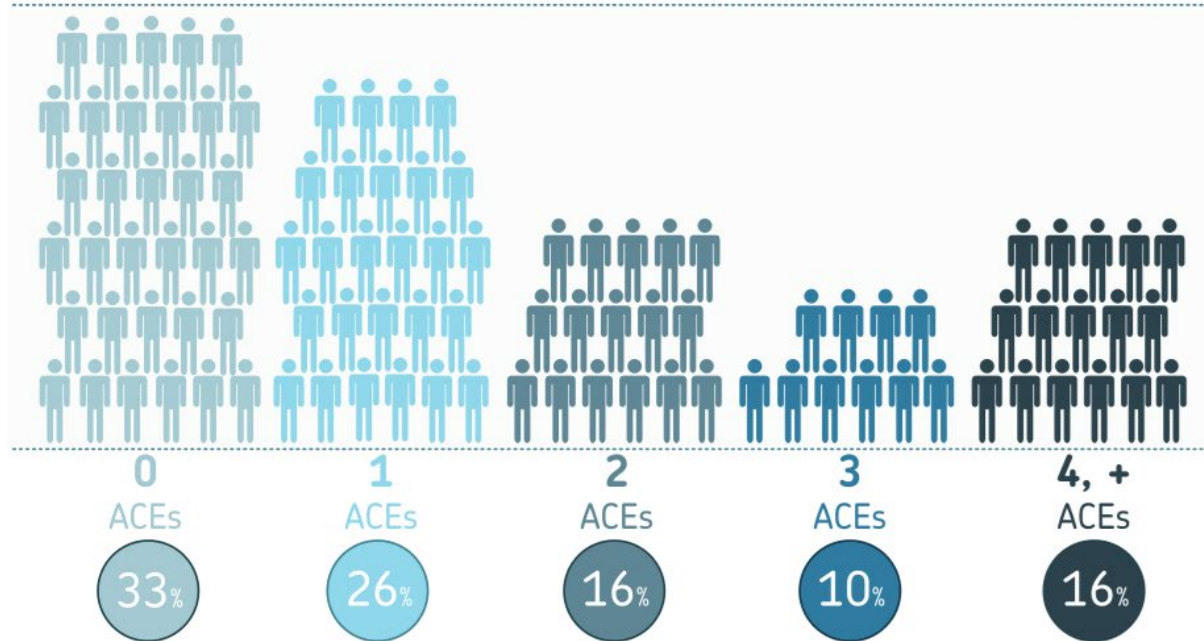
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## ACEs are Highly Interrelated:

Where One ACE Occurs,  
There are Usually Others

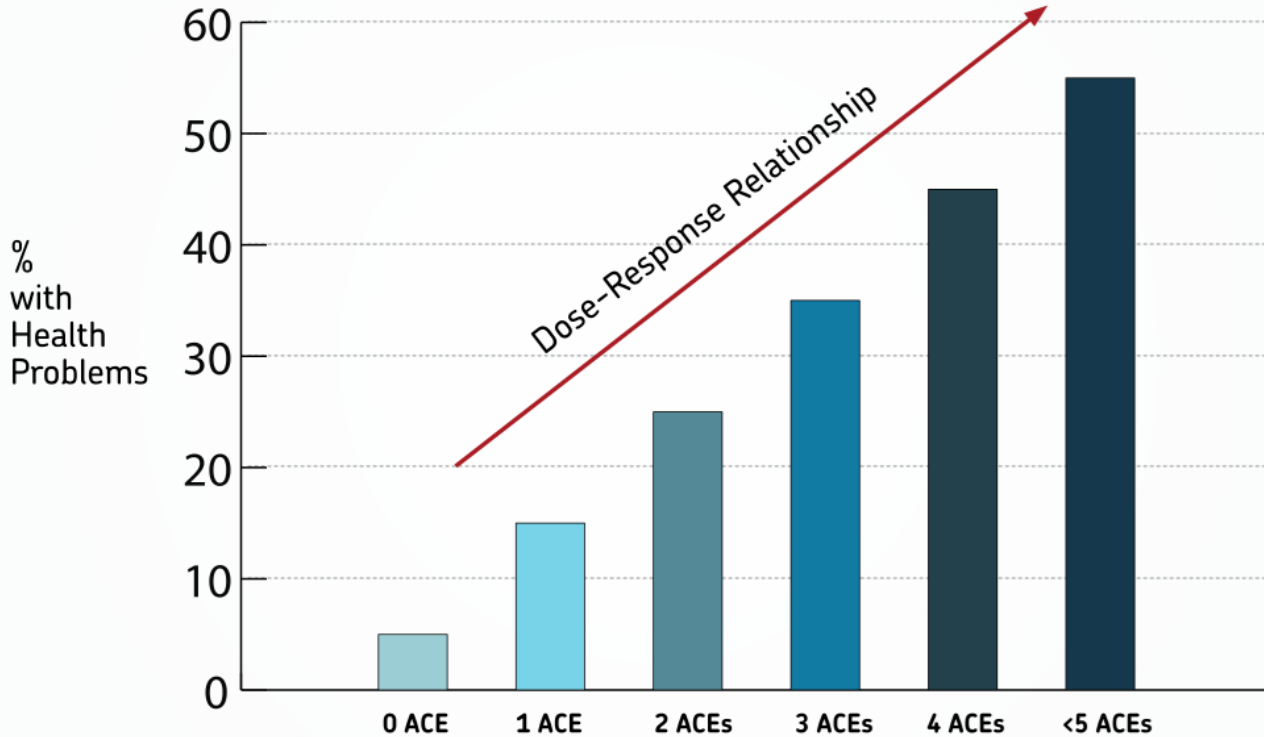


# ACE Score = Number of ACE Categories

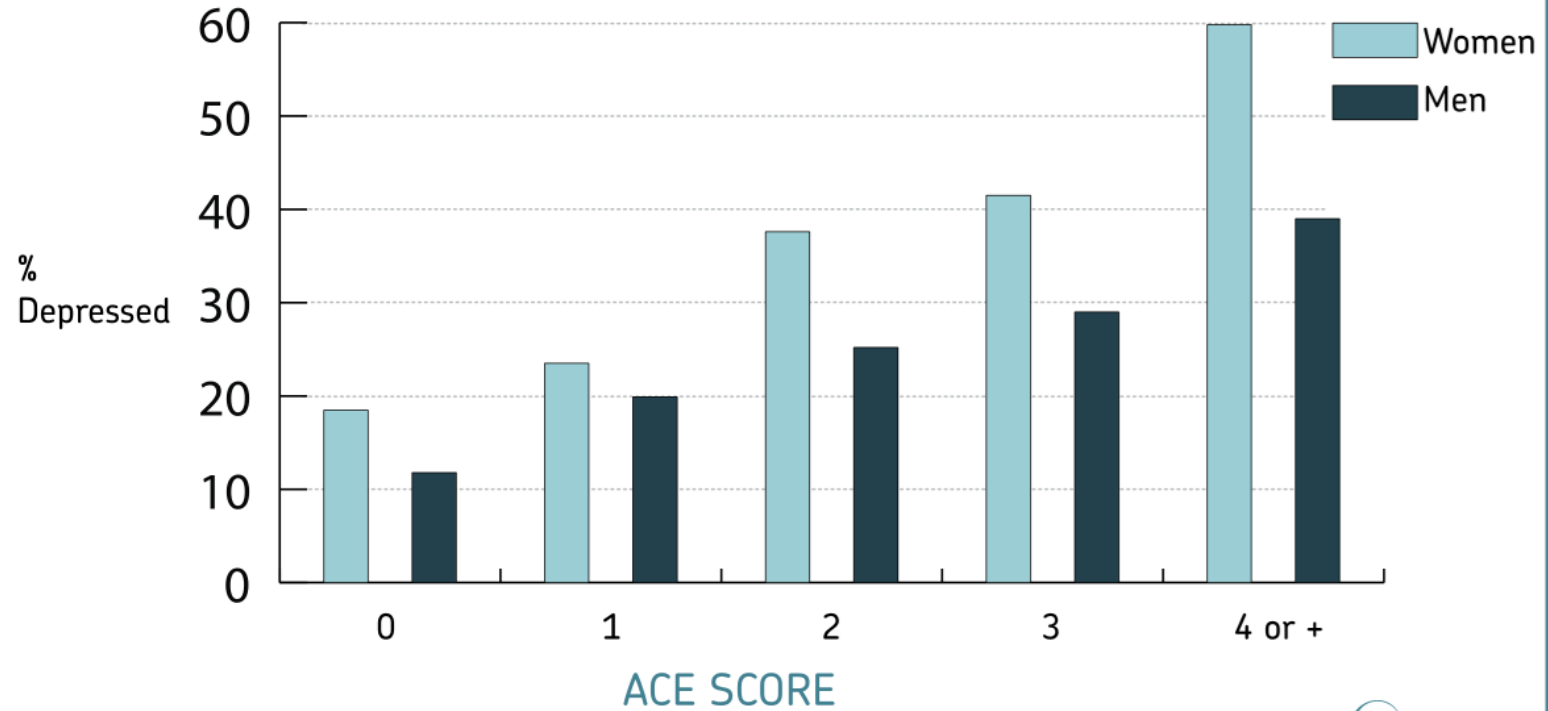


ACE Scores Reliably Predict Challenges During the Life Course

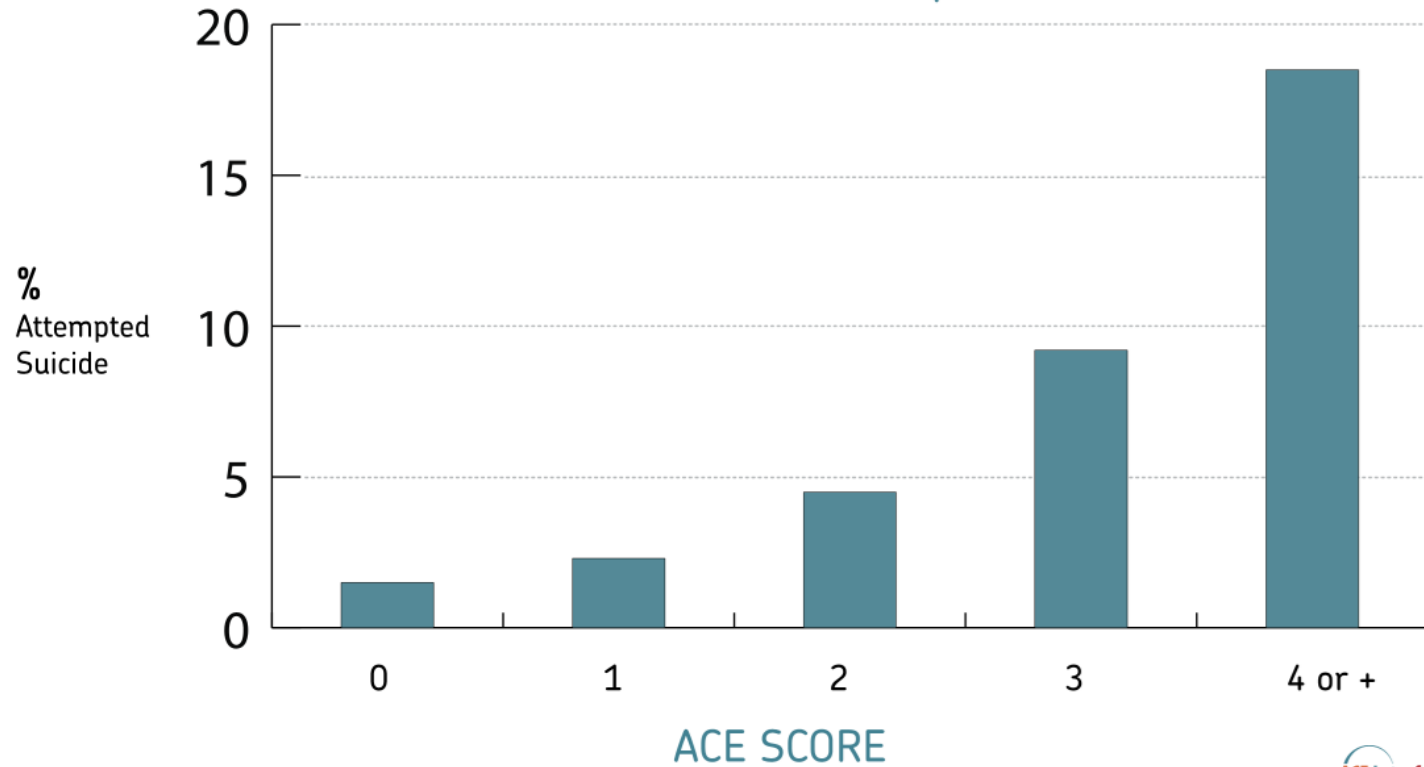
## ACE Score and Health Problems



## ACEs & Depression



## ACEs & Suicide Attempt





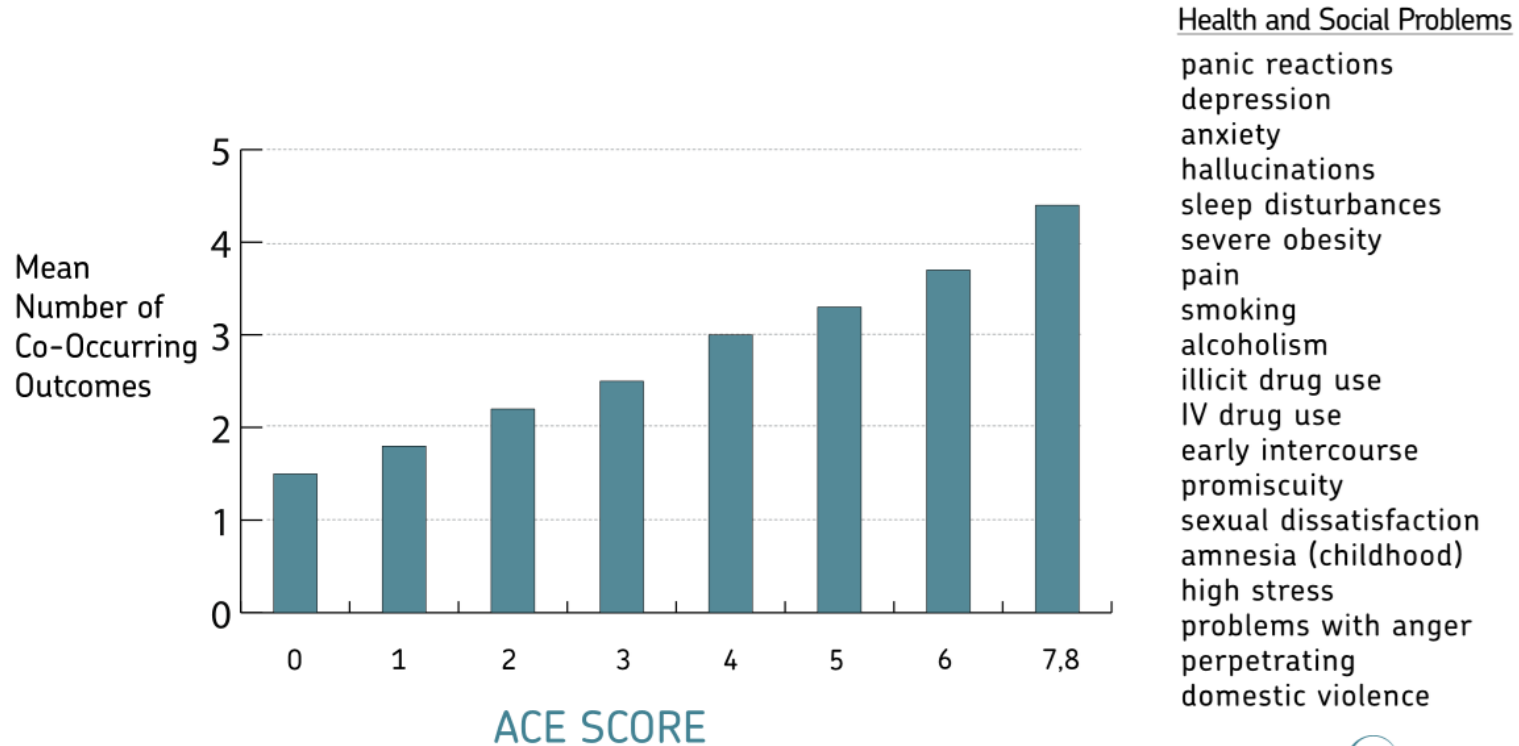
Anxiety  
Depression  
Difficulty Concentrating

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SMOKING

SMOKING

## Neurobiology and Epidemiology Converge



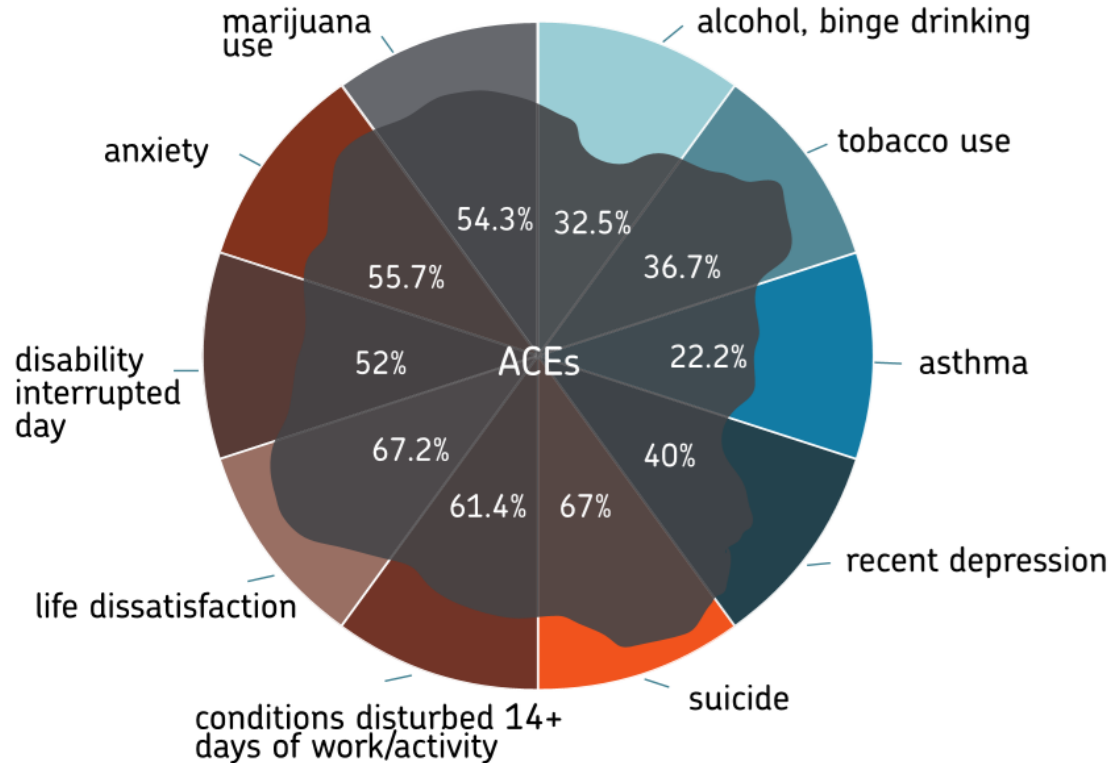


## Knocking Down ACE Scores ———— will prevent ————

- 3 homelessness, unemployment, incarceration
- 2 disability, learning problems
- 1 poverty



## Population Attributable Risk



Controls: gender, age, income, education, race-ethnicity

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# We

have the power to  
shift the dynamics  
that lead to  
high ACE scores.



“Adverse childhood experiences are a huge, *silent*, public health threat.”

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So, what *can* I do?

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# Risk Factors & Protective Factors

## Risk Factors

- Characteristics at the biological, psychological, family, community, or cultural level that precede and are associated with a higher likelihood of negative outcomes

## Protective Factors

- Characteristics associated with a lower likelihood of negative outcomes or that reduce a risk factor impact.
- *Countering or buffering events*

<https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/20190718-samhsa-risk-protective-factors.pdf>

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# Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs)

- A set of interpersonal relationships between family, friends, in school, and in community that fosters a child's capacity to thrive (American Psychiatric Association Foundation, 2025)



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2015 population study  
in Wisconsin

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Part of the BRFSS

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Asked about ACEs

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Asked about Positive  
Childhood experiences

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Correlated with mental  
health

## Developing the Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) score



**HOPE**  
HEALTHY OUTCOMES  
FROM POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

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# PCE Questions

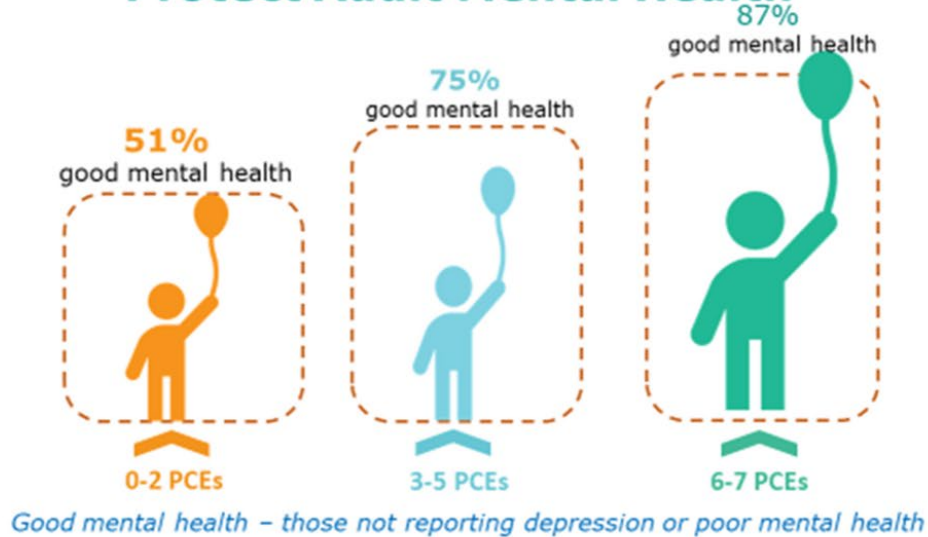
*As a child, how often did you ...*

1. Feel able to talk to your family about feelings
2. Feel your family stood by you during difficult times
3. Enjoy participating in community traditions
4. Feel a sense of belonging in high school
5. Feel supported by friends
6. Have at least two non-parent adults who took genuine interest in you
7. Feel safe and protected by an adult in your home





## Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) Protect Adult Mental Health



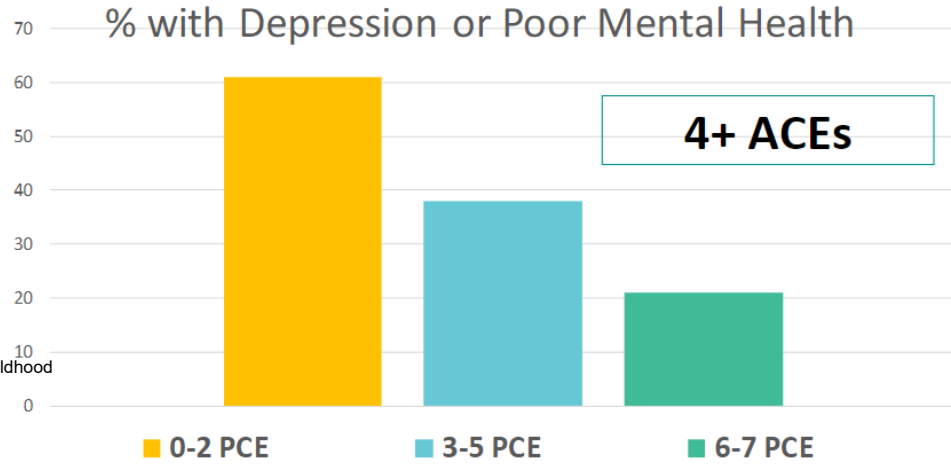
**PCEs  
protect  
adult  
mental  
health**

Bethell C, Jones J, Gombojav N, Linkenbach J, Sege R. Positive Childhood Experiences and Adult Mental and Relational Health in a Statewide Sample: Associations Across Adverse Childhood Experiences Levels. *JAMA Pediatr.* 2019 Sep 9; e193007

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# PCEs reduce the effects of ACEs

Bethell C, Jones J, Gombojav N, Linkenbach J, Sege R. Positive Childhood Experiences and Adult Mental and Relational Health in a Statewide Sample: Associations Across Adverse Childhood Experiences Levels. JAMA Pediatr. 2019 Sep 9;e193007



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Higher PCEs are  
Associated with  
Lower Rates of  
Chronic  
Conditions

## More PCEs reduce chronic conditions

Adults who report having no PCEs vs. reporting 3-5 or 6-7 PCEs

Adults who  
report having  
no PCEs



3-5 PCEs

12% less likely  
to report any  
chronic health  
condition



6-7 PCEs

22% less likely  
to report any  
chronic health  
condition

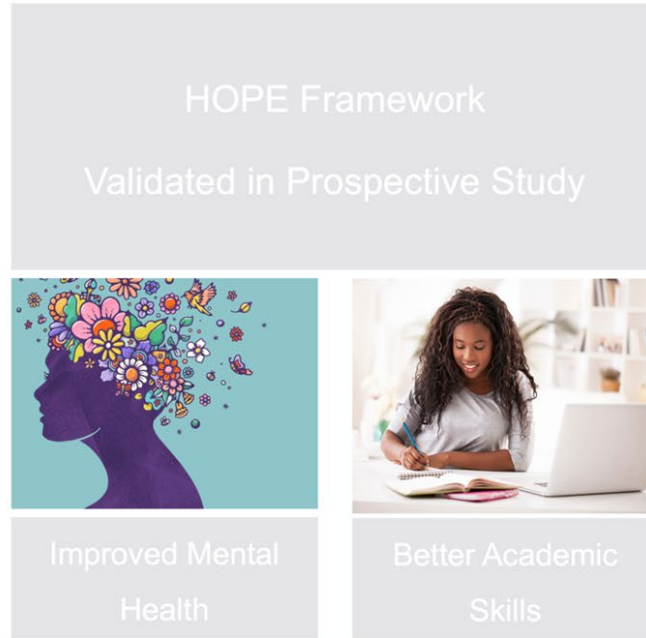


Sege RD, Aslam MV, Peterson C, et al. Positive Childhood Experiences and Adult Health and Opportunity Outcomes in 4 US States. JAMA Netw Open. 2025;8(7):e2524435. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2025.24435

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# Higher PCEs In Childhood Improves Adolescent Outcomes

National Longitudinal Survey of  
Australian Children



Source: Guo, Shuaijun, et al. "Measuring positive childhood experiences: testing the structural and predictive validity of the health outcomes from positive experiences (HOPE) framework." *Academic Pediatrics* 22.6 (2022): 942-951.

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PCEs in  
Adolescence  
Increase  
Positive  
Outcomes in  
Adulthood



Improved Mental  
and Overall Health



Insulates from  
negative outcomes

Kemp L, Elcombe E, Blythe S, Grace R, Donohoe K, Sege R. The Impact of Positive and Adverse Experiences in Adolescence on Health and Wellbeing Outcomes in Early Adulthood. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2024 Aug 29; 21(9):1147. DOI: [10.3390/ijerph21091147](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph21091147)

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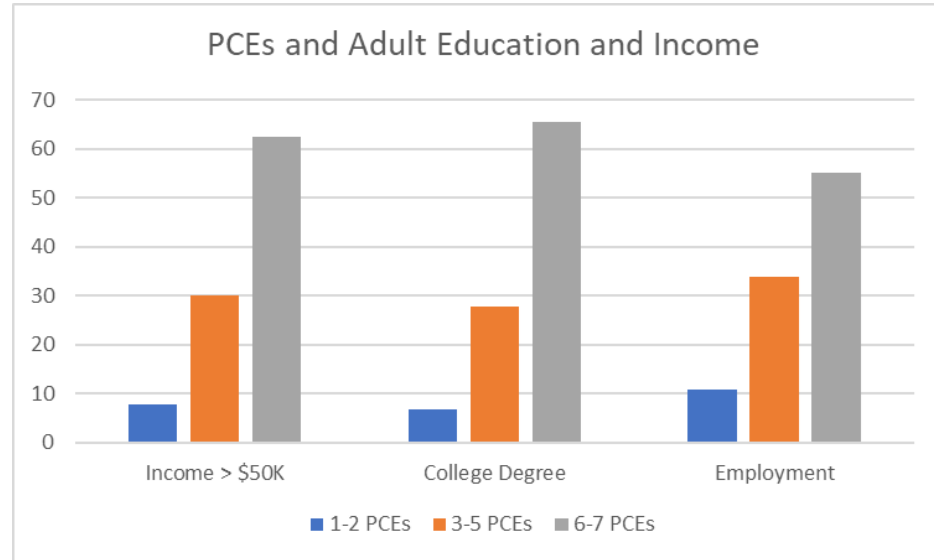
PCEs

Employment

Education

Income

National BRFSS Data (4 States)



*Preliminary BRFSS results from 4 states, unpublished. Courtesy of E. Swedo, CDC*



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## PCEs on health & behavior

- ACEs increased the odds of adolescent arrest, while PCEs decreased the odds (Blackwell et al., 2025)
- PCEs buffer the link between ACEs and adolescent delinquency (Blackwell et al., 2025)
- Community PCEs (CPCEs) were associated with lower odds of adult diseases – suggesting the benefit of enhancing early life PCEs in schools & neighborhoods (Mitani et al., 2024)

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Research indicates that the absence of PCEs may be more damaging to long-term health outcomes than the presence of ACEs.

HOPE

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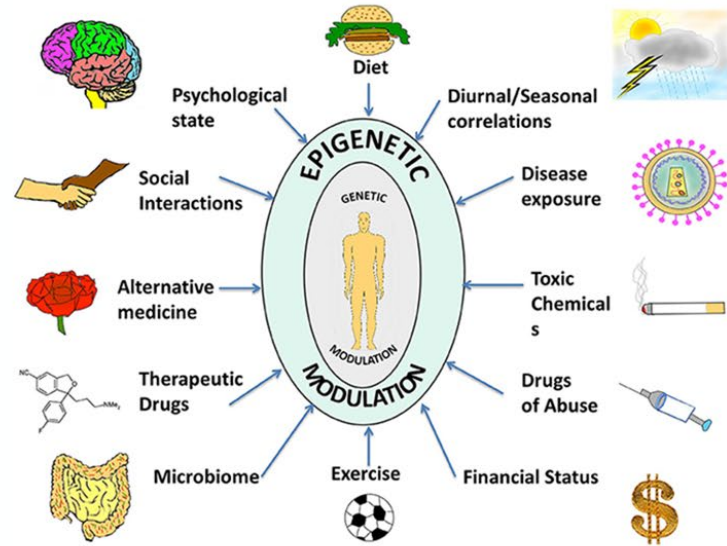
# Experiences change us

## Epigenetics

- The study of gene expression based on our environments and behaviors
- Experiences do not change DNA sequence, they can change the expression

## Multi & Inter-Generational

- We can inherit lived experiences
- Intergenerational transmission – parents' experiences are key drivers of their children's health (Blackwell et al., 2024)
- ALL experiences matter



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PCEs are associated with an economic value of \$216 billion (lower medical spending and additional healthy life years) in four states.

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Original Investigation | Pediatrics

## Positive Childhood Experiences and Adult Health and Opportunity Outcomes in 4 US States

Robert D. Sege, MD, PhD; Maria V. Aslam, PhD, MPH; Cora Peterson, PhD; Christina Bethell, PhD, MBA, MPH; Dina Burstein, MD, MPH; Phyllis Holditch Niolon, PhD; Jennifer Jones, MSW; Stephanie Ettinger de Cuba, PhD, MPH; Kelsey Hannan, BA; Elizabeth A. Swedo, MD, MPH

### Key Points

**Question** Are adult outcomes associated with exposure to positive childhood experiences (PCEs)?

**Findings** In this cross-sectional study of Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System data for 20 916 individuals across 4 states collected throughout 2015 to 2020, adults with PCEs had a higher probability of attaining postsecondary education, higher household income, and lower probability of multiple health risk behaviors and chronic diseases. PCEs were associated with an annual economic value of \$215.9 billion from reduced disease morbidity and mortality.

**Meaning** This cross-sectional study found that PCEs were associated with better life opportunities and reduced health risk behaviors and chronic diseases, supporting the consideration of strategies to promote these childhood experiences.

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THE



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# Promote the Positive

- If you are a parent
  - How can I provide positive experiences for my child?
- If you are a leader
  - How can I provide and promote positive experiences for my team members?
- If you are a service provider or frontline
  - How can I promote positive experiences for the people I serve?
- If you are a human
  - How can I provide positive experiences for myself and those I interact with?

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# 2024 Michigan BRFS

## Connection is Prevention

### How Positive Childhood Experiences Shape Michigan's Future

Positive childhood experiences (PCEs) are the everyday moments and relationships that help children feel safe, supported and connected. These experiences support emotional growth, build resilience and help children develop strong relationships and life skills. Because children's brains develop in response to their experiences — both positive and harmful — PCEs play a critical role in shaping healthy development. Research shows that PCEs not only buffer the effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) but also have a cumulative impact: the more positive experiences a person has in childhood, the better their health outcomes in adulthood.

In 2024, Michigan collected data on PCEs through the Michigan Behavioral Risk Factor Survey (MiBRFS). The data found that PCEs are common and lay the foundation for lifelong well-being and opportunity.

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# Community resilience looks like...



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# CONNECTION

SIMPLE WAYS TO SUPPORT WELL-BEING  
THROUGH CONNECTION AND CARE



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# CONNECTION & CARE

*why does this matter*

Everyone needs to feel seen, heard, and valued  
Small actions can improve mental and emotional well-being



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It starts with ourselves. When we check in with how we're feeling and take care of our needs, we're better able to support others.

## SelfCare

- Sleep: Crucial for managing the dysregulated stress response.
- Mindfulness/Mental Health: Techniques to calm the nervous system.
- Exercise: Physical activity to process stress hormones.
- Nutrition: Supporting the body against inflammation.
- Healthy Relationships: Relationships with loving caregivers act as a buffer for children

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# ACTION

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# STRATEGIES

*produce positive results*

Parental Resilience

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Home Visiting Program

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# HOME VISITING



- Builds parent Resilience
- Gives support in times of need
- Give knowledge of parenting and child development
- Reduces barriers
- Help kids learn to regulate emotions
- Reduce child abuse and neglect
- Improve school readiness
- Support healthy development
- Reduce later risk behaviors, including substance use

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# STRATEGIES

*produce positive results*

Parental Resilience

Parenting Skills



Home Visiting Program

Parenting Skills Classes

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# PARENTING SKILLS

## Parenting Skills



## Parenting Skills Classes



- Builds positive parent-child relationships
- Teaches effective communication
- Supports healthy discipline strategies
- Increases confidence and consistency
- Reduces stress and family conflict

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# STRATEGIES

*produce positive results*

Parental Resilience



Home Visiting Program

Parenting Skills



Parenting Skills Classes

Social Emotional Competence



Early Childhood Strategies

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# EARLY CHILDHOOD STRATEGIES

## Social Emotional Competence



## Early Childhood Strategies

- Builds positive parent-child relationships
- Teaches effective communication
- Supports healthy discipline strategies
- Increases confidence and consistency
- Reduces stress and family conflict
- Builds self regulation



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# STRATEGIES

*produce positive results*

Parental Resilience

Parenting Skills

Social Emotional Competence

Social Connections



Home Visiting Program



Parenting Skills Classes



Early Childhood Strategies



Girls Stand Strong Life Skills

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# GSS/LIFE SKILLS



Social  
Connections



Girls Stand Strong  
Life Skills

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# STRATEGIES

*produce positive results*

Parental Resilience

Parenting Skills

Social Emotional Competence

Social Connections

All Protective Factors



Home Visiting Program



Parenting Skills Classes



Early Childhood Strategies



Girls Stand Strong Life Skills



Family Events

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# FAMILY EVENTS

## *Sample Family Nights*

- Lego Dinner
- Game Night
- Journal Class
- Camping/reading night
- Glow party
- Cultural Food Night
- Cooking Class for family
- Book Club



All Protective  
Factors



Family Events

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THANK you

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# Questions & Discussion

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## Websites and Resources

<https://miace.org/> - Free CME and training opportunities

<https://miace.org/training-contract-services/speakers-bureau/> - Connect with a MIACE Trainer

[www.positiveexperience.org](http://www.positiveexperience.org) - HOPE (Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences) Framework

[CDC.gov](http://CDC.gov)

<https://cssp.org/project/strengthening-families/> - Strengthening Families

<https://preventchildabuse.org/> - Prevent Child Abuse America

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## Contact Information

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Hilary Marine - [hmarine@pathwavesconnect.org](mailto:hmarine@pathwavesconnect.org)

Debbie Wertz - [info@ccwaterford.org](mailto:info@ccwaterford.org)

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