

PCEs in Action: *Protective Experiences That Change Outcomes*

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Learning Objectives

- **Define** positive childhood experiences (PCEs) and describe their relationship to resilience and lifelong health and well-being.
- **Identify** key protective factors, relationships, and environmental conditions that promote positive childhood experiences and support resilience.
- **Apply** concepts of PCEs and resilience to recognize strategies for strengthening protective factors and supporting healthy development in children, families, and communities.

“Probably as long as humans have told stories to one another, there have been tales of individuals who overcame difficulties to succeed in life.”

- Dr. Ann Masten

Hummm...What name to use

PACES, PCE, benevolent childhood experiences, favorable childhood experiences, stressful life events (SLEs), adverse childhood relational experiences (ACRE), advantageous childhood experiences, child protective factors, counter-ACEs, positive action

Positive Childhood Experiences are defined by the American Psychiatric Association as a set of interpersonal relationships between family, friends, school and community that fosters a child's capacity to thrive.

protective and compensatory childhood experiences, flourishing, resiliency, positive influences, protective experiences, assets or promotive factors, benevolent childhood experiences, resiliency-building experiences, positive social support, interpersonal PCEs

Why PCE are important

- Seminal ACE Study (Felitti et al., 1998)
 - changes the way the brain and body develop
 - lead to maladaptive coping strategies
 - lead to the 5 leading causes of death
 - 20 year decrease in life expectancy
- 50% of all lifetime mental illness starts by age 14 years and 75% by age 24 years (Kessler et al., 2005).

Why PCE are important

- National economic burden of ACE-related adult health conditions was \$14.1 trillion annually
 - \$183 billion in medical spending and
 - \$13.9 trillion in lost healthy life-years
- That breaks down to \$88,000 thousand dollars per affected adult annually
- The **lifetime economic burden** per affected adult was highest in Arkansas at \$4.3 million – To put that in perspective North Dakota was the lowest at \$1.3 million

Peterson et al. (2023)

“Persons with ACE often are on such high psychotropic meds, they are unable to function, to feel like themselves, or frankly, feel anything at all. Persons of ACE lose the ability to be curious, to develop appropriately, to laugh, love, and be productive, working members of society.”

- van der Kolk (2015)

Role of Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs)

- Promotive & Protective Factors (Crandall et al., 2019; Narayan et al., 2018).
- Mitigate against negative effects of childhood adversity (Almeida et al., 2023).
 - Especially in populations facing extreme adversity
- Enhances resilience, emotion regulation, empathy and overall well-being (Crandall et al., 2019; Narayan et al., 2018).
- Cumulative effect (Han et al., 2023)
 - Their benefits increase as multiple positive experiences build up across various domains

PCE Outcomes – Children & Adolescents

Higher levels of PCEs were associated with:

- **Better mental health outcomes**
 - reduced depressive symptoms, anxiety, self-harm, substance use, and suicidal ideation
- **Improved psychosocial outcomes**
 - enhanced adult functioning and future orientation
- **Better academic achievement**
 - reduced absenteeism and fewer academic difficulties; and
- **Some improvements in physical health**
 - reduced chronic pain
- The relationship between PCEs and behavioral outcomes showed mixed results.

PCE relationship to lifelong health and well-being

- PCEs linked to lower depression and anxiety (Sanli et al., 2024).
- Frequent occurrence of PCEs enhances adult mental health (Sanli et al., 2024).
- Six or more PCEs were associated with better mental health and well-being in adolescents with and without ACEs (Samji et al, 2024).
- Reduced likelihood of reoffending, whereas ACEs were associated with higher odds of recidivism (Kowalski et al., 2022).

PCE relationship to lifelong health and well-being.

- Positive Childhood Experiences have a dose-response relationship with adult health (Bethell et al., 2019)
 - the more positive, stable, and nurturing experiences a person has growing up, the lower their risk for depression and poor adult health outcomes, even if they experienced severe childhood trauma.
- Crandell et al. (2019) found counter-ACEs protect against poor adult health and lead to better adult wellness.
 - When ACEs scores are moderate, counter-ACEs largely neutralize the negative effects of ACEs on adult health.

PCEs and Resilience

- The ability to overcome adverse or traumatic events.
- *“Resilience is better understood as a process that changes systems.”* (Ungar p. 17)
- Resilience as *“the capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten system function, viability, or development. The concept can be applied to systems of many kinds at many interacting levels, both living and nonliving, such as a microorganism, a child, a family, a security system, an economy, a forest, or the global climate.”* (Masten, pg. 6)

Hallmarks of Resiliency

- Ability to:
 - adapt to change
 - deal with what comes along
 - cope with stress
 - stay focused and think clearly
 - not get discouraged in the face of failure
 - handle unpleasant feelings (anger, pain or sadness)

Seven Crucial C's of Resilience

- **Competence:** ability to handle situations effectively through actual experience.
- **Confidence:** a solid belief in one's own abilities.
- **Connection:** family as a central force, but also ties to civic, educational, religious and athletic groups increase a sense of belonging.
- **Character:** sense of right and wrong to be sure they are prepared to make wise decisions, contribute to the world, and be stable adults.
- **Contribution:** youth who understand the importance of personal contribution gain a sense of purpose that can motivate them to improve the world.
- **Coping:** the best protection against unsafe, worrisome behaviors is possessing a wide range of positive, adaptive coping strategies.
- **Control:** a resilient child knows they have internal control in choices and actions to determine the results.

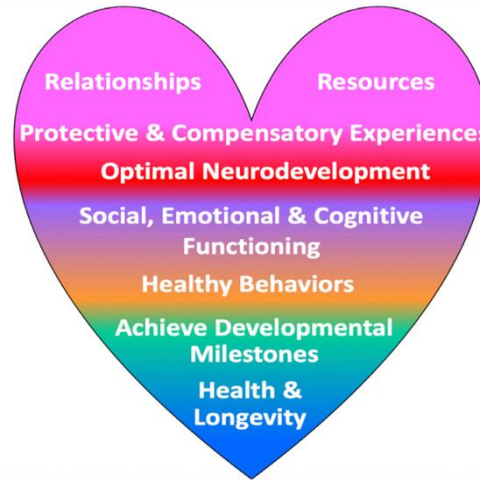
Protective factors, relationships, and
environmental conditions that promote
PCEs and support resilience



Seven Core PCEs to Foster Resilience and Mental Well-being

1. **Talk about feelings:** Being able to openly discuss painful or difficult emotions with family members.
2. **Family support:** Feeling a sense of active support from family during stressful or hard times.
3. **Community traditions:** Enjoying participating in local or cultural community traditions.
4. **High school belonging:** Experiencing a deep sense of connection and belonging at school.
5. **Friend support:** Feeling understood, valued, and backed up by friends.
6. **Caring non-parent adults:** Having at least two non-parent adults in the community, family, or school who genuinely cared.
7. **Home safety and protection:** Feeling physically and emotionally safe and protected by an adult in the home.

Supporting Relationships & Enriching Resources



- **Supportive relationships:** *unconditional love from a caregiver (positive parenting); having a best friend (social support); volunteering in the community; being part of a group (belonging); and having a mentor.*
 - *Positive parenting, social support, and belongingness have been found to facilitate the development of children's empathy, self-regulation and social skills.*
- **Enriching resources:** *living in a safe home where needs are met; getting a quality education; having a hobby; being physically active; and having rules and routines.*

Ordinary Magic by Dr. Ann Masten

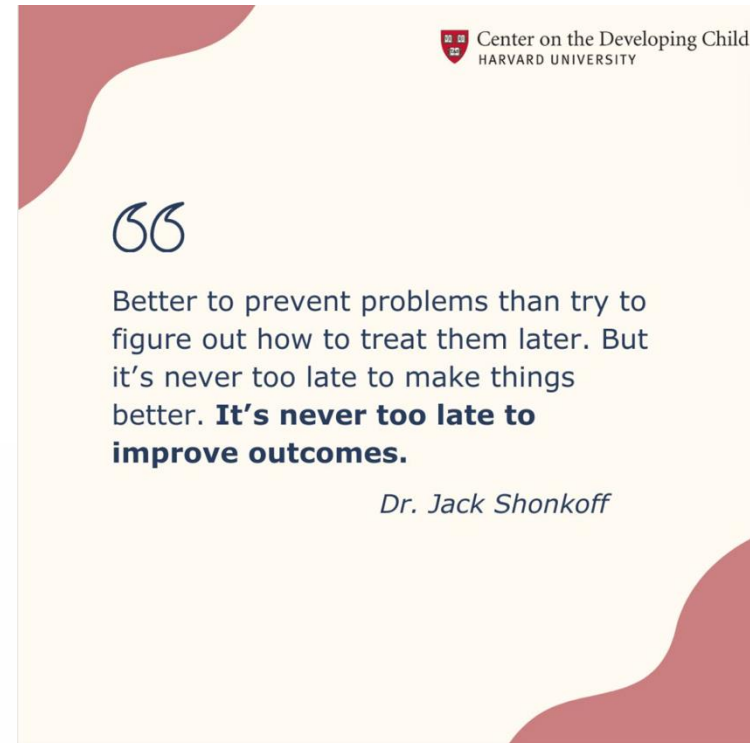
“Short list” of Psychosocial Resilience Factors

- Nurturing and sensitive care, parenting quality, close relationships, social supports
- Sense of belonging
- Problem-solving skills, adaptive intelligence
- Self-regulation, self-control, executive function skills
- Motivation to adapt or succeed, mastery motivation
- Self-efficacy, sense of agency
- Positive identity and view of self
- Hope, optimism, faith, positive outlook on the future
- Sense of purpose, belief life has meaning
- Positive routines, rituals and cultural traditions
- Community connections, support of safe and well-functioning communities

(Masten, 2025, p. 163)

Center on the Developing Child – Harvard University

Dr. Jack Shonkoff



National Scientific Council on the Developing Child
(2015). *Supportive Relationships and Active Skill-Building
Strengthen the Foundations of Resilience: Working Paper No. 13.*

- Resilience: result of a combination of protective factors
 - Neither individual characteristics nor social environments alone are likely to generate positive outcomes for children who experience prolonged periods of toxic stress.
 - We need positive individual characteristics **AND** positive social environments working together.
- Common set of factors that predispose children to positive outcomes
 - The availability of at least one stable, caring, and supportive relationship
 - Help youth build a sense of mastery over their life circumstances
 - Help youth develop strong executive function and self-regulation skills
 - The supportive context of affirming faith or cultural traditions.

From PCE to NEAR Science



*“If you put this science into the hands of the people,
they will do very wise things with it.”*

- **Laura Porter**, co-founder of ACE Interface, in the 2016 documentary [Resilience: The Biology of Stress and the Science of Hope]

Encourage Community Connections - Things to Remember

- Adopt a trauma-sensitive, strength-based, resiliency oriented approach.
- “*..we err when we don't put as great an effort into promoting and recognizing the positive as we do in correcting the negative.*” (Ginsburg, 2020, p.374).
- Advocation for the positive portrayal of youth in the community
- Include youth wisdom when designing community programs

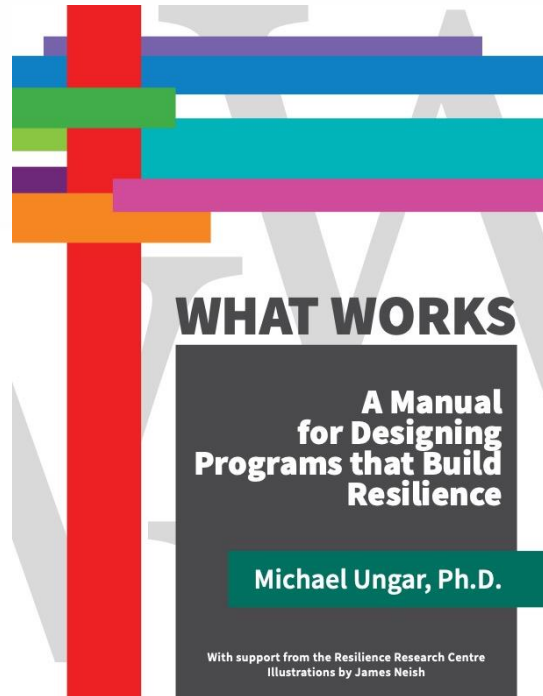
Encourage Community Connections - Things to Remember

- “One size fits all” programming seldom works.
- We need community connections that:
 - enhances youth the opportunity to thrive and find their niche
 - provide safe spaces to play and develop an innate curiosity and creativity
 - have spiritual and recreational centers with a wide variety of programs
 - establish community-based activities which promote family connections and effective parenting.

“No child should be left without adequate connections”

(Ginsburg, 2020, p. 375)

MANUALS FOR BUILDING RESILIENCY



DECEMBER 09, 2020

Roadmap for Resilience

The California Surgeon General's Report on Adverse Childhood Experiences, Toxic Stress, and Health



“Despite this lengthy list of adversities, children (and their caregivers) patiently explained to me that helping-professionals like me needed to focus more on the protective factors that predict successful adaptation despite a bad start in life, rather than endlessly diagnosing psychopathology, disorder, and other kinds of problems.”

Ungar, (n.d),(What Works, p.7)

The Center for Psychiatric Trauma and Mental Health (CPTMH)
invites you to the

4th annual ACE/Trauma Symposium for Stakeholders

***Turning ACE into Action: Trauma Informed
Law & Policy for Prevention***

with Keynote Speaker Supreme Court Associate
Justice Rhonda Wood

Friday September 25th, 2026

Registration: 7:45-8:00

Symposium: 8:00-2:30

PEAK Innovation Center

5900 Painter Lane

Fort Smith AR 72916

Symposium topics:

- ***The Future of Trauma-Informed Law: Policy, Practice, and System Change***
- ***A Justice's Perspective of Trauma-Informed Law & Policy and the Role Courts Should Play***
- ***Advancing Trauma-Informed Law: Transforming Policy and Practice***
- ***From Awareness to Reform: Creating Trauma-Informed Laws***

No charge

Light Breakfast and Lunch provided

Certificate of Attendance upon request!

Questions:

Dr. Lisa Albuja

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SCAN TO RSVP

Questions/Register: Lisa Albuja, 479-431-8152 or drlisaalbuja@cptmh.com

THANK YOU!



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