



SUPPORTING CHILD WELL-BEING THROUGH THE POWER OF POSITIVE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

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WHY THIS MATTERS?

While it may not always be possible to avoid toxic stress or trauma, it's helpful to know that positive childhood experiences are more powerful than we might imagine.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Researchers are beginning to understand how we are shaped by both the negative and positive experiences we have in childhood. Recent studies show that positive experiences during childhood build the foundation for someone's ability to cope and thrive throughout life.

There is no single list of positive experiences, but people with more of these experiences in childhood grow up to have better mental and physical health and greater ability to get through tough times.¹

EXAMPLES OF POSITIVE EXPERIENCES²



WHAT'S HAPPENING IN WISCONSIN?

Positive experiences are common for most of Wisconsin's children. According to the National Survey of Children's Health³:

- **61%** of children live in a supportive neighborhood
- **70%** of parents with young children sing or tell stories to them on most days
- **72%** of families eat a meal together on most days
- **95%** have an adult at home, school, or in the neighborhood who they can rely on for guidance

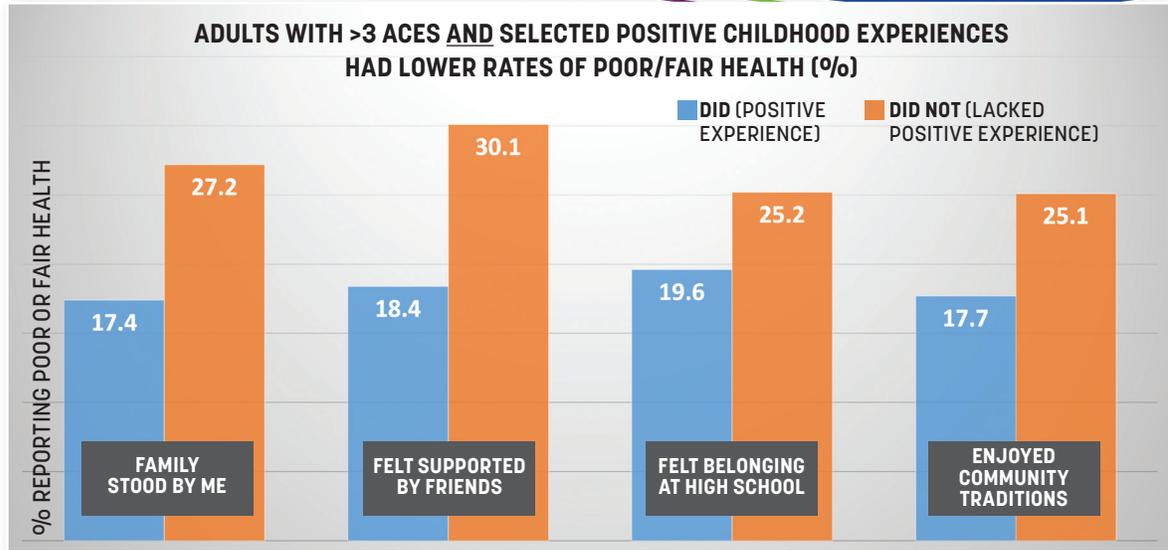


Lots of research has shown that abuse, neglect, and other adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) increase the risk of poor physical and health outcomes throughout a person's life. But that doesn't mean that a child who has experienced ACEs is doomed. People differ in their response to bad situations. Children who experienced trauma but can also point to positive experiences and relationships generally do better than similarly traumatized children who haven't had the benefit of positive experiences. Many researchers⁴ consider positive childhood experiences to be a "buffer" that protects against the worst consequences of trauma.

In the graph on the next page⁵, adults with three or more adverse childhood experiences were less likely to report poor or fair (rather than excellent or good) health if during childhood their family stood by them, they felt supported by friends, they felt like they belonged at school, or if they enjoyed community traditions.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

➔ SCHOOLS:

- Find ways to help low-performing or marginalized students feel a sense of pride and belonging at school.
- Create opportunities for fun and celebration to increase students' positive school experiences and sense of belonging.

➔ COMMUNITIES

- Host community celebrations to promote connectedness among neighbors and families.
- Promote school, youth sports, and other youth functions where parents and other community members can support and encourage young people.

➔ POLICYMAKERS

- Fund libraries, parks, and other public spaces where all children can connect positively with other people, regardless of family income.

- Help families by funding adult mental health services. Parents with good mental health and without active substance use issues are more likely to provide positive experiences and less likely to inflict negative experiences on their children.

➔ PARENTS:

- Remember that the little positive moments with your kids do matter – especially when your family is struggling.
- Start – or stick with – family routines such as meals together, bedtime stories, chore time, gaming together, or family walks. Even though kids may complain about such routines, research shows that in the long run they benefit from them.
- Some parents may benefit from therapy that helps them remember positive experiences from their own childhoods, so that they can more easily offer such positive moments to their own children.

REFERENCES:

¹ Doom JR, Seok D, Narayan AJ, Fox KR. (2021) "Adverse and Benevolent Childhood Experiences Predict Mental Health During the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Adversity and Resilience Science*, 23:1-12. doi: 10.1007/s42844-021-00038-6.

² Doom, Jenalee. (April 21, 2021) "Positive Childhood Experiences May Improve Mental Health." *Psychology Today*. https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/origins-health/202104/positive-childhood-experiences-may-improve-mental-health?sm_a_u_=_iVVv2ft3TnP3F06MBLQvK7BJGKjp

³ National Survey of Children's Health, 2018-19. <https://www.childhealthdata.org/browse/survey>

⁴ Crandall et al. (2019) "ACEs and counter-ACEs: How positive and negative childhood experiences influence adult health." *Child Abuse and Neglect*, Issue 96.

⁵ Chart adapted from page 15 of Sege, R. et al (2017). "Balancing adverse childhood experiences with HOPE: New insights into the role of positive experience on child and family development." Boston: The Medical Foundation. www.cssp.org