

# PCES

## Positive childhood experiences

Fortunately, we know that we are impacted by more than just the bad experiences we have. For example, having a supportive friend or partner, living in a safe neighbourhood, and having access to nutritious food are all things the general public thinks of as positive. And there is research linking each of these positive experiences to better health!

Recent research has been working to identify the types of [positive childhood experiences](#) that may play a role in long-term health. One measure of these positive childhood experiences, for example, called benevolent childhood experiences, identifies the following 10 experiences as being good for adult mental health:

1. Having at least one safe caregiver (not all caregivers may be safe, but having at least one is associated with better outcomes)
2. Having one good friend
3. Having comforting beliefs
4. Enjoying school
5. Having one caring teacher
6. Having good neighbours
7. Having an adult who is not a parent or caregiver who can provide support
8. Having opportunities to have fun
9. Having a positive self-concept
10. Having a home routine that is predictable

Recent research has demonstrated that adults with more of these positive or benevolent childhood experiences have fewer mental health problems (Bethell et al., 2019; Narayan et al., 2018), better [diet](#) and fewer sleep problems (Crandall et al., 2019), and less risky [sex](#) and substance use (Crandall et al., 2020). As a result, there is growing evidence that more of these positive childhood experiences are protective for both mental and physical health in adults.

### 7 Positive Childhood Experiences



## Practical steps to increase positive experiences:

One good thing is that these positive experiences do not require anything extraordinary to implement. For example, you don't need a million dollars to have a friend or a caregiver who cares about you. The following are some steps for increasing or strengthening positive childhood experiences to potentially improve their later mental and physical health:

1. It is important to educate parents about the types of experiences that children should have that are associated with better mental and physical health in adulthood. For example, having caregivers, friends, and mentors who the child knows are there for them no matter what is extremely important, so caregivers can help facilitate and strengthen these relationships. In addition, having a predictable routine at home and providing opportunities for fun are ways that caregivers can increase positive childhood experiences.
2. Knowing what types of experiences are most important to foster in children helps us decide what resources we should provide to caregivers. For example, providing parents with financial resources to help them be there for their child, such as a living wage or paid time off, will allow them the time to be able to be there for their child instead of having to work multiple jobs. In addition, these resources may reduce financial strain on caregivers, which would allow them more mental space to be present and responsive to children without having to worry about money.
3. [Therapy](#) for adults that strengthens positive childhood memories could be a resource for adults to access during difficult times. Strengthening these positive childhood memories could also lay a foundation for creating more positive experiences for their own children, which may improve mental health in the next generation.

Taking time to reflect on positive childhood experiences could be particularly helpful for boosting your mood and feeling better during these [stressful](#) times. And increasing these positive experiences for children in your own life may be a great way to improve mental health for the next generation!

### References

Bethell, C., Jones, J., Gombojav, N., Linkenbach, J., & Sege, R. (2019). Positive childhood experiences and adult mental and relational health in a statewide sample: Associations across adverse childhood experiences levels. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 173(11), e193007–e193007.

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