

The Evolve Therapeutic Services (ETS) Nurturing Protective and Positive Childhood Experience Framework



Evolve Therapeutic Services, Child & Youth Mental Health Service (Queensland Health)
(Email: ETS-SW-ProgramManagement@health.qld.gov.au)



Exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) can have lasting impact on infants, children and young people. Exposure to ACEs can increase risk for changes in brain anatomy, mental health challenges, behavioural difficulties and delays in social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development etc. A high ACE score is also linked to longer engagement with services, impacting service costs and capacity to see others. Despite high ACE scores, some young people “do OK”. ACEs are only part of a person's life journey and who they are. The question is then, what factors create a level of protectiveness that helped them to ‘survive and thrive’ despite difficult childhoods?

Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) are the activities and experiences that shape a young person’s life, development and future health. They are experiences that can buffer against the negative lifelong health effects caused by exposure to ACEs. Young people need experiences that help them to grow, learn and to trust others even when life is uncertain, difficult or frightening. Protective factors, and PCEs, are experiences that can be implemented in multiple environments and settings, and the types of experiences that have the most healing are not ones that can be bought nor need to cost a lot of money.

The ETS Nurturing Protective and PCE Framework, provides empirical evidence-based tangible steps to buffering the negative impact of ACEs. The framework can assist caregivers, support agencies and stakeholders in developing a plan of action. At the centre of the framework are several core messages young people need to hear, and integrate, in order to increase ACE protection and recovery. These messages can be developed, and reinforced, by implementing five (5) core action-oriented protective and PCE actions/behaviours.

MEET - Everyone has their own unique set of needs. In the ETS framework, in addition to Maslow’s ‘physiological needs’, we encourage a core number of other basic human needs. Having these needs met helps support and/or promote resiliency and recovery.

SUPPORT - Early relationships affect all areas of our development and our internal working models (how we view ourselves, others and the world around us). The quality of the attachment relationship is crucial. If a caregiver responds and meets the need/s in a meaningful, and appropriate way consistently, the young person learns to trust that their needs will be met. This leads to greater attachment security, increased sense of self and increased level of protection.

GROW - Although early life development can help shape us as adults, personal development does not stop in the early/formative years. Setting goals helps trigger new behaviours, helps guide focus and helps sustain momentum in life. Goals also help align focus and promote a sense of self-mastery. This also increases the young person’s sense of self autonomy and agency.

CREATE - Nurturing, supportive and positive relationships is critical, so are the environments that the young person lives/engages in. If an environment is not safe, the survival brain is triggered. Once there is a level of ‘safety’ then development, growth and positive childhood experiences are more likely to occur. Critical environments can include, home / placement / family, co-tenants, friends / peers, school, community activities.

BUILD - With compromised early childhood and trauma (including intergenerational and racism), young people often have missed out on critical developmental knowledge and skills. It is important to understand what these are, and to look behind the current presenting ‘behaviour’ and consider what appropriate knowledge/skills they might have missed out on. Just because they are 10-years old does not mean they are functioning/have the knowledge of a 10-year-old.

