

# Creating Safe, Stable, Nurturing Relationships and Environments for Children

Safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments can prevent multiple forms of violence and promote resilience among youth and communities.<sup>1</sup> Primary prevention strategies that change social norms and strengthen economic supports can help create safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments for all children and families in California.<sup>2</sup> Safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments may help to:

- Reduce occurrence and negative effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)
- Prevent or mitigate toxic stress associated with ACEs
- Improve physical, cognitive, and emotional outcomes for children as they grow up
- Reduce health inequities
- Improve overall health across the lifespan.<sup>3</sup>

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events that occur before age 18, including physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, emotional or physical neglect, and other types of household challenges, such as mental illness, substance use, incarceration, parental separation or divorce, or witnessing domestic violence.<sup>4</sup>

Child Abuse Prevention Councils (CAPCs) can be the catalysts, conveners, and coordinators of prevention efforts at the local-level.<sup>5</sup> In this leadership role, CAPCs can prioritize primary prevention strategies and facilitate community support to prevent and reduce ACEs and child maltreatment. CAPCs and other children and family service providers can contribute to creating safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments by connecting families with resources, educating about policies that improve child wellbeing, and supporting primary prevention strategies that promote healthy and equitable environments for children.

## Awareness, Commitment, and Norms Survey

In 2019, the Awareness, Commitment, and Norms Survey, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), measured social norms and awareness of factors that contribute to childhood adversity among a representative sample of 800 adults from California. Survey respondents were asked about:

- Parenting behaviors that support nurturing relationships with their children
- Awareness of societal factors that contribute to childhood adversity
- Support for policy change to increase opportunities for all children to succeed.

## Key Survey Findings

### Parents and caregivers of children in California engage in positive parenting behaviors.

Table 1. Percentage of survey respondents who practiced the following positive parenting behaviors every day or almost every day in the past year.

Positive parenting behaviors*	Percentage
Let your child know when you liked what he or she did <sup>a</sup>	86%
Responded to your crying infant by trying to comfort them <sup>b</sup>	79%
Played with or read a story to your child <sup>a</sup>	74%
Helped your child express themselves with words when they were angry or frustrated <sup>a</sup>	66%

<sup>a</sup> Survey items were asked among adults with children under 5 years old (n=238)

<sup>b</sup> Survey item was asked among adults who cared for an infant in the past year (n=212)

## Californians are aware of the societal factors that contribute to childhood adversity.

Table 2. Percentage of survey respondents who agree that the following societal factors contribute to reasons why children struggle.

Societal and environmental factors*	Percentage
Children growing up living in poverty	86%
Children not having high quality childcare	80%
Lack of public investment in low income neighborhoods and communities of color (e.g., lack of investment in education, schools, job opportunities)	76%
Employers not paying parents enough to support a family	73%
Employers not adopting family-friendly practices (e.g., paying family and sick leave, flexible schedules to accommodate children's needs)	70%

## Californians support policies that increase opportunities for all children to succeed.

Table 3. Percentage of survey respondents who support the following ways to increase opportunities for all children.

Ways to increase opportunities for all children*	Percentage
Safe and stable housing	81%
Have at least one adult (other than a parent or caregiver) who would provide a safe, stable, nurturing relationship for their children (e.g., mentor, coach, teacher)	78%
Have a full-time job that provides sufficient income to cover basic needs (e.g., food, housing, child care, medical care)	77%
Family-friendly work policies (e.g., flexible and consistent schedules, on-site or subsidized childcare, paid leave)	71%
Income support if employment changes or household income is below what is needed to provide basic needs (e.g., cash assistance, vouchers, tax credits)	69%

\*Wording of survey items has been slightly adapted for purposes of this document. For more information about the Awareness, Commitment, Norms Survey, please contact: [ivpb@cdph.ca.gov](mailto:ivpb@cdph.ca.gov).

## Conclusion

- Californians report they practice positive parenting behaviors, are aware of environmental factors that contribute to childhood adversity, and support strategies to increase opportunities for all children.
- CAPCs and other family service providers can adopt and implement primary prevention strategies to address societal and environmental factors that influence child wellbeing. Primary prevention strategies include:
  - Reducing poverty (e.g., uptake of child tax credits, paid family leave)
  - Improving economic stability and access to transportation
  - Increasing social connectedness within the community
  - Improving access to healthcare and overall health
  - Improving school readiness, neighborhood safety, and play areas for children
  - Increasing public awareness and engaging in strategies to support community education, engagement, and outreach.<sup>2,5</sup>
- Supporting safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments can improve health outcomes for children as they grow up.<sup>2</sup>



# Resources

The following list contains resources and tools that individuals working in CAPCs and other children and family service providers can use to learn more about primary prevention strategies, connect with organizations working at the local-level to achieve child wellbeing, and educate families and community members.

- Strategies that improve safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments: [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Technical Packages for Violence Prevention](#) and [VetoViolence website](#)
- Primary prevention resources for Child Abuse Prevention Councils (CAPCs): [Best Practices Guidelines for California's Child Abuse Prevention Councils](#)
- Five key protective factors for families and communities: [Center for the Study of Social Policy's Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework](#)
- For more information about existing state policies that strengthen economic supports for families in California:
  - California Earned Income Tax Credit (CalEITC) and Young Child Tax Credit (YCTC): [CalEITC4Me.org](#)
  - Paid Family Leave (PFL): [California Partnership to End Domestic Violence's Strengthening Access to Economic Supports webpage](#)
- Learn about groups working at the local-level in each county to achieve child wellbeing through policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change: [Essentials for Childhood Initiative California Child Wellbeing Coalition e-Guide](#)
- Explore trainings, webinars, and resources available for administrators, staff, and stakeholders of Family Resource Centers (FRCs), Child Abuse Prevention Councils (CAPCs), and child welfare agencies in the state of California: [California Training Institute \(CalTrin\)](#)
- Share interactive stories with community members to explore how to manage specific scenarios and create social norm change: [California Partnership to End Domestic Violence's Interactive Story Platform](#)
- Learn about the economic impact of child abuse and neglect in California: [Safe & Sound's Economics of Child Abuse](#)
- Strategies for preventing and addressing ACEs and toxic stress in the social services sector: [From Adversity to Resilience in the Social Services Sector: Findings from Roadmap for Resilience: The California Surgeon General's Report on Adverse Childhood Experiences, Toxic Stress, and Health](#)

*If you have feedback, questions, or would like to know more about data from the Awareness, Commitment, and Norms Survey, please contact: [ivpb@cdph.ca.gov](mailto:ivpb@cdph.ca.gov).*

## References:

1. Wilkins, N., Tsao, B., Hertz, M., Davis, R., Klevens, J. (2014). Connecting the Dots: An Overview of the Links Among Multiple Forms of Violence. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Oakland, CA: Prevention Institute.
2. Fortson, B. L., Klevens, J., Merrick, M. T., Gilbert, L. K., & Alexander, S. P. (2016). Preventing child abuse and neglect: A technical package for policy, norm, and programmatic activities. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
3. Essentials for Childhood: Creating Safe, Stable, Nurturing Relationships and Environments for All Children. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
4. California Department Public Health, Injury and Violence Prevention Branch and the California Department of Social Services, Office of Child Abuse Prevention, California Essentials for Childhood Initiative, the University of California, Davis Violence Prevention Research Program, the University of California, Firearm Violence Research Center (2020). Adverse Childhood Experiences Data Report: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), 2011 - 2017: An Overview of Adverse Childhood Experiences in California. CA: California Department of Public Health and the California Department of Social Services.
5. Strategies 2.0 and the California Department of Social Services, Office of Child Abuse Prevention (2020). Best Practice Guidelines for California's Child Abuse Prevention Councils.

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