



# BUFFERING THE EFFECTS OF ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES



## ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

YMCA COMMUNITY SUPPORT SERVICES





# Content was created based on the Strengthening Families Framework

The following Protective Factors have been shown to increase optimal child development and family functioning, and reduce the likelihood of child maltreatment. When these five factors are in place, children and families are more likely to have increased health and well-being.

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# Parental Resilience

The ability to “bounce back” or “transform through adversity”. Resilience often looks like being able to navigate through challenges and manage the stress of day-to-day life.



Sleep soundly. Science confirms the importance of quality sleep on our bodies and minds. Having a wind-down routine can help signal to the body that it is time to rest and helps us slow down in order to get a good night’s sleep and keep energy levels up. Be mindful of caffeine consumption in order to support rest.



Feed your body well and stay hydrated. Eat balanced and nutritious foods to keep your energy up and your body functioning well. Hydrate with low sugar drinks.



Limit alcoholic beverages and other mind-altering substances. While these substances may provide respite, they can inhibit sound decision-making.



Listen to music. Listening to music can release feel good chemicals in the brain and encourage relaxation. Music can also decrease stress and help balance negative emotions.



Try mindfulness and/or meditation. Headspace and Calm are apps that offer guided mediations with a variety of topics and lengths.



Carve out time for the different roles in your life. Adult time is often filled with work and parenting. It is important to make time for yourself and your interests that extend beyond these two roles. This may be a hobby like creating art, an exercise or sport, or spending time learning something new.



# Social Connections

Everyone needs positive, nurturing and supportive relationships. Friendships, social connections and networks of support are important for self-care, emotional health and well-being.



We all have different social needs. Think about which social interactions fill you up and which wear you down. For some, celebrating a birthday is exhausting while others leave feeling connected to a community. Explore different options for connecting. How many people do you prefer? Are live interactions better than connecting through written cards or letters? How often feels right for connecting with others?



Maintain relationships with supportive family members. Visiting with family in-person is ideal, and video calls or phone calls can be just as good! Children will learn about their family cultures, histories and traditions, and feel a sense of belonging and kinship.



Take an interest in children's social lives. Nurture friendships between your child and their friends. Helping children build friendships with their peers is a great way to teach them the value of positive social connections. Skills to identify and maintain strong and stable friendships will carry long-term benefits into adulthood.



Strong and stable relationships extend beyond family and friends. Consider building adult friendships with those you work with, learn with, who share your spiritual ideas, or are neighbors in your community.



Offer a listening ear or support those who trust you. With time, these compassionate acts can nurture relationships and will eventually grow into reliable and supportive connections.

# Spotlight Idea

Attend a virtual  
Community Café  
to connect with  
other parents and  
caregivers.

Hosted nationally by  
<https://www.beststrongfamilies.org/>

Hosted locally by YMCA of San Diego  
County Strengthening Families

For more information  
[crsbehaviorsupport@ymcasd.org](mailto:crsbehaviorsupport@ymcasd.org)  
or call 1-800-481-2151

[Click to join our Community Cafe interest list](#)

# Knowledge of parenting & child development

Children don't come with a manual and knowing how to respond to individual child needs can be hard! Making sure that adult caregivers have access to information and support for positive parenting practices, as well as understanding child development, can help ensure that parents have resources to be the best parents they can.

Children's bodies and brains grow and change quickly. Milestones track this development from infancy to adolescence like smiling, walking, talking, reasoning, puberty and many others. It is important to remember that each child develops at their own pace and has unique biology and experiences that shape their development.

It is common for caregivers to feel stuck at times. Caregivers do not always know how to meet the psychological and physical needs of growing and changing children.

Parenting toddlers and teenagers can be hard. These two time periods can be difficult because children are growing and changing in important ways. When caregivers know what to expect and have skills to effectively parent through these periods, caregivers and children can deepen their connection and bond.

Seek guidance and gain skills through books, reliable child development websites, support groups and counseling support, or reach out to the child's medical doctor for reliable resources.

Consistency and predictability create safety for everyone in a household. They also make it easier to notice which changes may be leading to challenging behaviors and to positive behaviors. Creating routines and schedules are a first step to begin to create regularity for families.

**Zero to Three website**  
(<https://www.zerotothree.org/>)

**CDC Developmental Tracker website**  
(<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html>)



# Concrete supports in times of need

Everyone needs support at some point in time. This can include basic needs like child care, food, housing, or utility assistance, and also things like education, training and employment supports. When families know where to turn for help, and resources are easily accessible, families are more likely to access them.

Every child and family needs concrete help at different points in life. All children and families have basic needs, like shelter, nutritious foods, clean clothing, healthcare, and safety in order to live and thrive. If your family is ever in need, there are organizations in your community who can help.

Struggling to make ends meet can increase parental stress and risk factors associated with maltreatment.

Contact 2-1-1 San Diego for referrals to local resources ([211sandiego.org](https://211sandiego.org))

Access and Crisis Line for mental health needs (888)724-7240

First 5 San Diego <https://first5sandiego.org/programs/>

YMCA Childcare Resource Service for help accessing quality childcare <https://www.ymcasd.org/community-support/childcare-resource-service>



# Social & emotional competence of children

The ability to express emotions, manage behavior and interact positively with others are critical life skills for both children and adults. Healthy child development happens in the context of caring, supportive, nurturing and attached relationships with caregivers.

Caregivers play an especially important role in showing children how to handle emotions, behave in different environments, and engage in relationships and community.

CAAVE was created by the YMCA Youth and Family Services to build strong connection and relationships.

## The elements of CAAVE

**C = compassion, A = awareness, A = acceptance, V = validation, E = empowerment - bring about warm and responsive parent/caregiver relationships with children and promote their growth and development.**

**C** - Compassion is empathy, plus the desire to help. It is an action to relieve distress. Parents/caregivers can slow down and communicate compassion both verbally and non-verbally when responding to the needs of children.

**A** - Awareness of our internal and external experiences without judgement of those sensations helps to accurately identify our thoughts, feelings and motivations. Judgements are often based on personal values and can get in the way of our interactions with others. For parents and caregivers, awareness is an important part of caring for children. Self-awareness can improve interactions with children, especially when setting limits for their health and safety.

**A** - Acceptance is complete and total acceptance of a given situation. Family situations can be complex and sometimes difficult. Acceptance of those circumstances does not mean parents/caregivers have to like a situation, or agree with it, simply accept it as reality at that moment. Acceptance of the child, their age and development, strengths and weaknesses promotes emotional closeness and understanding of a child.



**CONTINUED**



## Social and emotional competence of children (continued)

**V** - Validation is recognizing a child's internal experience and communicating that understanding. It is not fixing or avoiding a child's experience, response or behavior. It is communicating understanding, which can soothe an upset or scared child. It tells a child that what they see and feel is valid and ok. By doing this, children will learn to identify their own emotions and other people's emotions.

**E** - Empowerment is access to a wide range of age-appropriate choices. Identifying options with children, like which pajamas they want to wear or which pizza toppings they want, develops decision-making and problem-solving skills. Children will learn to look for options and solutions as they grow and learn.



Use times that you are already connecting with your child to teach about emotions. While playing together or reading stories, wonder with your child about what the characters are feeling. Ask how they know. These moments are helping your child learn about their emotions as well as others.



Playing games can teach about social interactions and negotiating rules. Engaging in age-appropriate games creates fun opportunities to develop these skills and practice them with people your child trusts.



Enjoy quality playtime together and let your child take the lead on creative and imaginative play. It is a great way for them to explore and express emotions and build social skills.

As a parent or caregiver, consider reflecting on:

- What are my strengths and areas of growth in managing my own emotions?
- What emotions are easiest and hardest for me to identify and express?
- How might these strengths and areas of growth impact my parenting and relationship with my child(ren)?



The Y currently offers a behavior consultation warm-line to families and child care providers. Through these free and confidential phone-based consultations, we offer a listening and empathetic ear to problem-solve challenges with parenting, provide support in coping with the current stressors, and provide guidance in helping children understand their emotions.

**To connect with one of our behavior support specialists, email [crsbehaviorsupport@ymcasd.org](mailto:crsbehaviorsupport@ymcasd.org) or call 1-800-481-2151.**





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The YMCA of San Diego County is dedicated to improving the quality of human life and to helping all people realize their fullest potential as children of God through the development of the spirit, mind and body.