

Adverse Childhood Experiences in Minnesota: Mental Well-Being

Mental well-being plays a significant role in promoting positive youth development, including promoting a sense of empowerment, positive identity, and social competence. Strong mental well-being is linked to a wide range of positive outcomes related to improved academic engagement and achievement, mental health and self-esteem, social skills and healthy relationships, greater involvement in prosocial and extracurricular activities, and reduced behavior concerns and risk-taking (Arnold, 2017; Cargo et al., 2003; Hukkelberg et al., 2019; Kirk et al., 2016; Waid & Urich, 2020).

It is important to note that promoting mental well-being, specifically positive identity, is critical for members of marginalized groups and identities, including individuals who identify as Black, Indigenous, a person of color and/or LGBTQIA+. Mental well-being and developing a strong positive sense of identity can serve as a protective factor to mitigate stress and other negative impacts caused by marginalization and discrimination (Hoy-Ellis, 2023; Juang & Kiang, 2019; Rostosky et al., 2018; University of Pittsburgh, 2019). For the most current local data on empowerment, positive identity, and social competence among young people, please visit MDH's interactive [Adverse Childhood Experiences Data \(www.web.health.state.mn.us/communities/ace/data/index.html\)](http://www.web.health.state.mn.us/communities/ace/data/index.html).

Effective strategies

Strategies for promoting youth mental well-being include:

- **Youth leadership programs and opportunities** to foster a sense of empowerment, provide a way for youth to explore interests, and to learn skills such as collaboration and problem solving (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022; Felter et al., 2023; Ginwright & James, 2002; Ozer, 2017; Waid & Urich, 2020). Programming may involve focusing on leadership skills generally or specific topic areas, such as training youth on how to support a peer with mental health concerns. Youth advisory boards include youth as part of a decision-making process in an organization or system, such as in foster care systems. These activities may also involve youth-led initiatives, such as advocacy, community organizing, or participatory action research projects, in which youth are engaged as key partners to identify, assess, and design strategies for addressing a problem.

Research indicates there are several strategies that can promote positive mental well-being among youth.

Relevant indicator(s):

- Social competence
- Empowerment
- Positive identity

Strategies for promoting positive peer relationships and school climate and promoting relationships with caring adults can also promote mental well-being among youth.

- **Programs promoting well-being and positive youth development**, including those that aim to promote a positive sense of self and identity, build social and relationship skills, and strengthen self-esteem, confidence, and a sense of empowerment (Dotterweich, 2021; Scott & Krinke, 2018; Waid & Urich, 2020; Youth.gov, n.d.). These may include school-based curriculums; social-emotional learning programs; and extracurricular activities that allow students to learn about their interests, develop their identity and autonomy, and strengthen their sense of belonging with others.
- **Programs promoting positive identity specifically among members of marginalized communities**, which can help buffer the negative impacts of discriminatory experiences. These opportunities can include school- or community-based programming and curricula for youth of specific racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds; extracurricular clubs, such as Gender-Sexuality Alliances; and mentoring programs based on a shared identity (Aldana & Byrd, 2015; Blake-Beard et al., 2011; Russell et al., 2009). Family interventions can also provide support to youth coming out about their sexual orientation to their families and address negative reactions from family members (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014).

Examples of Minnesota initiatives

Restoration for All's Cultural Healing Events

Restoration for All provides culturally specific activities and aims to promote interconnectedness, mutual support, strength, positive cultural identities, and post-traumatic growth among immigrant and refugee communities. They provide activities grounded in the humanities, community dialogues and conversations, workshops, participatory activities, and presentations.

View the video highlighting [Restoration for All Inc. ACE Case Study \(youtu.be/PN-PWe_D0g0\)](https://youtu.be/PN-PWe_D0g0)

More information [About Us - Restoration for All Inc. \(restoreall.org/about-us/\)](https://restoreall.org/about-us/)

4-H Programs through the University of Minnesota-Extension

The University of Minnesota-Extension's 4-H program offers a wide range of extracurricular learning activities across the state, including those related to science, arts and photography, agriculture and gardening, life skills, civic engagement, and sports or outdoor activities.

More information [About 4-H \(extension.umn.edu/4-h/about-4-h\)](https://extension.umn.edu/4-h/about-4-h)

Polk County Youth Advisory Board

The Polk County Youth Advisory Board provides a civic engagement and leadership development opportunity for youth in Polk County with a focus on public health. The Board is youth-led, and they plan and implement projects community improvement.

More information about the Polk County [Youth Advisory Board \(www.co.polk.mn.us/509/Youth-Advisory-Board-YAB\)](https://www.co.polk.mn.us/509/Youth-Advisory-Board-YAB)

Girls on the Run Minnesota

The Minnesota chapter of Girls on The Run aims to teach life and social skills, such as empathy, communication, and critical thinking; build confidence and independence; strengthen emotional and physical health; and develop positive relationships while incorporating exercise-based activities. There are separate programs for girls in 3rd-5th grades and 6th-8th grades.

More information about [Girls on the Run Minnesota \(www.gotrmn.org/\)](http://www.gotrmn.org/)

More information about national [Girls on the Run \(www.girlsontherun.org/\)](http://www.girlsontherun.org/)

Examples of national initiatives

Positive Racial Identity Development in Early Education (PRIDE)

PRIDE aims to develop positive racial identities among young Black children as well as provide education to and support teachers and caregivers in understanding race and its impact on youth. It involves trainings and workshops for teachers and other professionals, speaker sessions, programming for caregivers, and arts-based activities that are grounded in and celebrate Black and Africana culture.

More information [About P.R.I.D.E. \(www.racepride.pitt.edu/about-pride/\)](http://www.racepride.pitt.edu/about-pride/)

Family Acceptance Project

The Family Acceptance Project is an evidence-based model for supporting families with a youth who identify as LGBTQIA+ and promoting family acceptance of their youth's identity. The Project provides trainings for caregivers, providers, faith leaders, and government agencies on using the family support model and related strategies. They also offer materials and resources in several languages.

More information [Welcome to the Family Acceptance Project \(familyproject.sfsu.edu/\)](http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/)

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