

Meet our Facilitator- Dr. Richard Booth

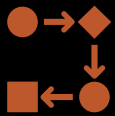
- Licensed Mental Health Counselor in private practice and at Brown University.
- Born in Jamaica and lived there until moving to inner city Boston where he spent his formative years.
- Conducts and provides consultation, workshops, trainings, seminars, and focused programming to a variety of organizations and Educational Institutions.



Th
So



Session Objectives

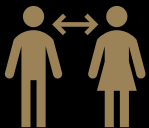


Identify

Key Positive Childhood Experiences (**PCEs**) and describe how they contribute to resilience and protective factors against substance misuse, including social media and AI. considerations and emerging guidance for youth, providers, and organizations related to improving positive social media use and the integration of AI tools in prevention messaging. strategies helping youth improving positive experiences online including practical approaches for amplifying PCEs and improve relationships, practices, and skills.



Examine



Develop

Focus on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

- The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) framework has been instrumental in illustrating the profound and long-term impact of early-life stressors in the developmental trajectories of children and families and well-being of our communities. However, despite its groundbreaking contributions, the ACEs framework predominately adopts a deficit-oriented lens, focusing on risk factors while often neglecting the protective and positive experiences children and families also experience. In the United States, communities that have been historically marginalized, including racial and ethnic minorities, are disproportionately impacted by ACEs due to systemic inequities and historical injustices, leading to persistent sociodemographic health and social disparities.
- The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) framework ([Felitti et al., 1998](#)) was pioneering in deepening our understanding of the pervasive impact of early-life stressors such as abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction on the developmental and health trajectories of children, adults, families and communities. Marginalized communities (e.g., racial/ethnic minorities, lower socioeconomic status) are disproportionately affected by ACEs due to systemic inequities and historical injustices, perpetuating sociodemographic health and social disparities ([Bernard et al., 2022](#); [Flores & Salazar, 2017](#)). ACEs, by definition, represent a deficit-oriented perspective and focus on the presence of risk factors; however, this may inadvertently fail to acknowledge positive experiences or protective factors that influence both ACE exposure and outcomes.



Let's Talk

- WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES WITH YOUTH, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND AI?
- WHAT BENEFITS AND RISKS DO WE SEE WHEN WE THINK ABOUT YOUTH EXPERIENCES WITH SOCIAL MEDIA AND AI?

Reasons Why Young People Use

WHEN ASKED, YOUNG PEOPLE OFFER A NUMBER OF REASONS FOR USING DRUGS; MOST OFTEN THEY CITE A DESIRE TO CHANGE THE WAY THEY FEEL, OR TO “GET HIGH.”

OTHER REASONS INCLUDE:

ESCAPE SCHOOL AND FAMILY PRESSURES

- LOW SELF-ESTEEM
- TO BE ACCEPTED BY THEIR PEERS
- TO FEEL ADULT-LIKE OR SOPHISTICATED
- CURIOSITY
- PERCEPTION OF LOW RISK ASSOCIATED WITH DRUGS
- AVAILABILITY OF DRUGS

Other Factors Why Youth Use

WHAT OTHER FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO DRUG ABUSE AMONG YOUTH?

SOCIETAL PROMOTION OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE

- BOMBARDMENT OF PRESCRIPTIONS FOR DRUGS
- OUR SOCIETY FREQUENTLY PORTRAYS DRUG-TAKING IN A POSITIVE LIGHT WITH NOT ENOUGH REALISTIC DEPICTION OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF DRUG USE.
- LEADING FIGURES IN SPORTS, ENTERTAINMENT AND PUBLIC LIFE OPENLY DISCUSS THEIR DRUG USE, SENDING A MESSAGE THAT TAKING DRUGS IS “NORMAL” BEHAVIOR.

LACK OF INFORMATION OR INTERVENTION

- MANY ADULTS ARE UNINFORMED—OR IN DENIAL—ABOUT DRUG USE.
- MANY ADULTS LACK THE PRACTICAL INFORMATION FOR POSITIVELY INTERVENING

COMMUNITY INDIFFERENCE ALLOWS THE DRUG PROBLEM TO ESCALATE

- IN SOME COMMUNITIES, DRUG ABUSE GOES HAND-IN-HAND WITH COMMUNITY APATHY.
- IMPLICIT ACCEPTANCE OF DRUG DEALING
- LACK OF KNOWLEDGE CONCERNING RESOURCES

Creating Positive Childhood Experiences

FOSTERING POSITIVE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES INVOLVES ASSESSING NEEDS AND ENACTING PROGRAMMING FROM MULTIPLE OVERLAPPING SPHERES OF INTERACTION.

- ACTIONABLE
- PROMOTING HEALTHY ACCOUNTABILITY-ENCOURAGE BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES THAT PROTECT AGAINST VIOLENCE AND ADVERSITY.
- HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS
- PARENTING SKILLS

FAMILY
TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR RELATIONSHIPS AND INDIVIDUAL AGENCY AND MAKING POSITIVE CHOICES

TEACHING LIFE SKILLS
EDUCATING YOUTH AND CAREGIVERS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS ON SKILLS THAT PROMOTE POSITIVE INTERACTIONS, RESILIENCE, RESPECT, CIVILITY, AND COMPASSION. PROVIDING TOOLS TO COPE WITH OBSTACLES AND THE COMPASSION TO SUPPORT OTHERS

CREATING SAFE SPACES
SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS AND ENVIRONMENTS ARE STRONGLY ASSOCIATED WITH IMPROVED HEALTH OUTCOMES AND MAY REPAIR AND STRENGTHEN NEUROLOGICAL PATHWAYS PREVIOUSLY HARMED FROM PERIODS OF DEPRIVATION.

THE ABILITY TO TALK ABOUT FEELINGS CHANGES OUTCOMES

FEELING SUPPORTED DURING DIFFICULT TIMES

ENJOYING COMMUNITY TRADITIONS

SENSE OF BELONGING-PEERS ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO TEENS

HAVING AT LEAST TWO NON-PARENT ADULTS WHO GENUINELY CARE

FEELING SAFE AND PROTECTED BY ADULTS

PCE'S

Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs): A Strength-Based Approach to Prevention

Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) are the meaningful, supportive, and affirming experiences in a young person's life that build resilience, strengthen mental health, and protect against future risk behaviors—including substance misuse. Examples of PCEs include:

- Feeling emotionally safe, supported, and valued at home
- Having caring adults inside and outside the family
- Feeling a sense of belonging at school
- Being included and accepted by peers
- Opportunities to contribute and feel useful in the community
- Developing positive coping skills, hope, and future orientation

PCEs focus not on what has gone wrong in a child's life, but on the **power of what can go right**.



PCE'S MATTER

- **Why Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) Matter for Reducing Youth Substance Use**
- Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs)—such as supportive relationships, feeling safe at home and school, opportunities to contribute, and a sense of belonging—play a **powerful protective role** in preventing youth substance misuse.
- PCEs strengthen core developmental systems that buffer against stress, improve emotional regulation, and foster healthy identity formation.
- Research shows that youth with higher levels of PCEs demonstrate **significantly lower rates of substance use**, even when they have been exposed to adversity or ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences).
- PCEs promote **connection, coping, and hope**, which directly reduce vulnerability to substance use.
- Supportive adult-youth relationships and positive peer connections reduce the likelihood of experimenting with substances, while meaningful participation in school, community, and extracurricular activities increases motivation and future orientation—both strongly associated with reduced risk.
- Importantly, PCEs do not simply counteract adversity; they actively build the psychological, social, and emotional resources that help youth thrive. Strengthening PCEs is therefore a key evidence-based strategy in comprehensive substance misuse prevention.






STRENGTHS BASED PERSPECTIVE

- **A Strength-Based Perspective: How It Differs**
- Traditional approaches to prevention often emphasize risks—such as trauma, family conflict, peer pressure, or community stressors.
 - While these are important to understand, a risk-only lens can unintentionally portray youth as “vulnerable,” “at-risk,” or “damaged,” which limits how adults see them and how youth see themselves.
 - Focuses on problems, trauma, and what youth lack
 - Asks “What’s wrong with this youth?”
 - Often adult-directed
 - Can feel stigmatizing
- A strength-based PCE approach takes a different stance:
 - Focuses on assets, relationships, and what youth already have or can build
 - Asks “What’s strong in this youth and their environment?”
 - Actively builds protective factors
 - Encourages youth voice, agency, belonging, and hope

Both lenses matter—but the PCE perspective brings a more actionable, engaging, and hopeful approach that resonates with youth and prevention providers.



WHY THIS SHIFT MATTERS

- **Why This Shift Matters**
- A strength-based, PCE-focused strategy does more than reduce risk—it **builds thriving**, not just “less harm.” When youth experience consistent connection, support, and opportunity, they are naturally less inclined to use substances. They don’t just avoid negative behaviors; they develop the skills, relationships, and confidence needed to pursue positive ones.
- This approach helps prevention providers move from:
“How do we keep youth from using substances?”
to
“How do we create conditions where youth don’t *want* to use substances?”



How PCE's Help Reduce Youth Substance Abuse

- **How PCEs Help Reduce Youth Substance Use**
- Research shows that PCEs decrease substance use by strengthening the psychological and social systems that help youth stay healthy:
- **1. Strong, supportive relationships reduce experimentation.**
- Youth who feel connected to caring adults and peers are less likely to try substances and more likely to seek help when stressed.
- **2. Belonging protects against risky peer influence.**
- Feeling accepted at school or in activities reduces the need to fit in through substance use.
- **3. Emotional regulation skills lower the need for maladaptive coping.**
- PCEs build coping skills, problem-solving, and emotional awareness—key alternatives to using substances to manage stress.
- **4. Identity development and purpose create natural motivation for healthy choices.**
- Youth with a sense of identity, goals, and future orientation engage less in behaviors that could threaten long-term aspirations.
- **5. Hope and optimism counteract the impact of adversity.**
- Even when youth have faced trauma or ACEs, PCEs buffer negative effects and strengthen recovery pathways.

A young girl with dark hair and a white shirt is the central figure, her eyes closed in a peaceful expression. The background is a dark chalkboard covered in white chalk drawings of a rocket ship, a planet with rings, stars, and musical notes. The text is overlaid on the image in a clean, white, sans-serif font.

Let's Talk

**CAN WE GENERATE A LISTING OF
COMMON PCE'S AND HOW AI AND
SOCIAL MEDIA CAN:
WEAKEN
STRENGTHEN**



Social Media and Ai Defined

Social Media

- Digital platforms where people create, share, and interact with content and each other in real time. Examples:
 - TikTok
 - Instagram
 - Snapchat
 - YouTube
 - Discord
- Key Features: User-generated content
 - Likes
 - Comments
 - Sharing
 - Messaging
 - Algorithm-driven feeds that shape what youth see
 - Community-building, identity expression, rapid trend exposure

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- Computer systems that perform tasks requiring human-like intelligence. Such as understanding language, generating content, recognizing patterns, or making predictions. Examples:
 - Chatbots,
 - TikTok/
 - YouTube algorithms,
 - deepfakes, image generators
- Key Capabilities: Learns from data
 - Creates text, images, and videos
 - Predicts preferences and behaviors
 - Automates complex or repetitive tasks
- How They Connect
 - Social media depends on AI for recommendations, moderation, and targeted content.
- Youth interact with AI daily, often without realizing it.



Dangers of Social Media

Dangers of Social Media on Youth

Risks, Mental Health, Development, and Safety

- **Mental Health Risks**

- Increased anxiety & depression
- Social comparison & FOMO
- Body image concerns
- Sleep disruption from nighttime device use

- **Exposure to Harmful Content**

- Pro-substance imagery & peer vaping culture
- Violence, self-harm, or sexual content
- Misinformation about health and coping

- **Cognitive & Developmental Impacts**

- Reduced attention span
- Impaired executive functioning
- Increased impulsivity
- Distorted identity development

- **Cognitive & Developmental Impacts**

- Reduced attention span
- Impaired executive functioning
- Increased impulsivity
- Distorted identity development

- **Exposure to Harmful Content**

- Youth may encounter:
- Pro-substance imagery & peer vaping culture
- Violence, self-harm, or sexual content
- Misinformation about health and coping



Dangers of Social Media

- **Addictive Design**
- Infinite scroll
- Variable reward reinforcement
- Notifications and “likes” driving dopamine loops
- Hard-to-disengage platform design
- **Privacy & Digital Footprint Risks**
- Oversharing personal information
- Location tracking and safety concerns
- Permanent online footprint
- Impacts on future opportunities
- **Cyberbullying & Online Harassment**
- 24/7 access increases psychological harm
- Strong link to anxiety, depression, suicidality
- Cyberbullying predicts higher likelihood of substance experimentation

DANGERS OF AI

- **AI-Driven Misinformation**

- AI can create realistic but false content
- Fake health advice, substance myths, “DIY detox,” etc.
- Youth struggle to identify credible sources

- **Deepfakes & Image Manipulation**

- Faked photos/videos used for:
 - Bullying
 - Sextortion
 - Reputation damage
- Hard for youth to distinguish real vs manipulated content


- **AI Companions & Emotional Risks**

- Over-attachment to AI “friends”
- Reduced real-world relationship development
- Potential for inappropriate or unsafe conversations
- Influencing decision-making during vulnerable moments

- **Algorithmic Bias & Inequity**

- AI systems may reinforce stereotypes
- Biased moderation or targeting
- Underrepresented youth more likely to be misclassified

- **Reduction of Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs)**

- AI overuse can displace:
 - Face-to-face relationships
 - Mentorship and community ties
 - Physical activity and hobbies
- Protective factors linked to lower substance use

Social Media Not All Bad

- Social media has risks—but it also provides important benefits for youth.
- Positive Functions of Social Media
 - Identity exploration: Teens try out interests, values, and ways of expressing themselves.
 - Connection & belonging: Helps maintain friendships, especially for isolated or marginalized youth.
 - Peer support: Youth often seek advice, encouragement, and emotional validation.
 - Community-building: Online groups create spaces for shared interests, culture, hobbies, and empowerment.
 - Access to resources: Mental health education, coping tools, crisis hotlines, academic tutorials, creative skill-building.
- The Balanced View: It's important to acknowledge that social media and AI CAN BE LEVERAGED with youth to intentionally and safely support well-being.



Benefits of Social Media & AI Use for Youth

1. Social Support, Connection & Reduced Isolation

Online social support linked to stronger perceived support, **not** higher anxiety/depression (MDPI). Youth maintain friendships and emotional connections, especially when offline environments are isolating (Hopkins Medicine). Marginalized youth (e.g., LGBTQ+) find identity-safe communities and peer support (AAP).

2. Identity Exploration & Self-Expression

Platforms allow adolescents to explore interests, hobbies, style, and opinions — fostering self-understanding and self-esteem (Wjarr, Hopkins). Online spaces help reduce stigma, support self-affirmation, and connect with peers sharing similar experiences (AAP).

3. Access to Information & Resources

Social media provides mental-health resources, educational content, and support networks otherwise unavailable locally (Hopkins, Indiana Government). Online connection buffers stress during crises like pandemics, helping youth cope and feel less lonely (MDPI, Indiana Government).





BENEFITS AND IMPLICATIONS

■ 4. Opportunities for Engagement & Skill-Building

- Digital spaces support creativity, collaboration, and community engagement, boosting agency and purpose (Wjarr, AAP).
- Youth-driven online environments contribute to resilience and supportive network building (Hopkins, MDPI).

■ 5. Nuanced Effects — Context Matters

- Social media impacts vary: **active, supportive use** → **positive effects**, passive/harmful content → risks (OUP, PubMed, Hopkins).

- Positive outcomes strongest when youth engage meaningfully with peers, communities, and identity-affirming content.

■ Implications for Prevention & Mental Health

- Encourage **strength-based, identity-affirming, community-oriented use**.
- Leverage digital spaces to enhance **protective factors** (support, belonging, identity, resources).
- Integrate digital engagement quality into programs: supportive communities, positive content, balanced use, and digital literacy.
- Social media is **complex, not purely risky** — guided use can promote resilience, especially for marginalized or isolated youth.



Considerations for Providers

1. PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY

- PROTECT YOUTH DATA WHEN USING DIGITAL PLATFORMS, APPS, OR AI TOOLS.
- ENSURE COMPLIANCE WITH HIPAA, FERPA, AND LOCAL REGULATIONS.
- DISCUSS BOUNDARIES OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION WITH YOUTH.

2. INFORMED USE & DIGITAL LITERACY

- TEACH YOUTH HOW TO CRITICALLY EVALUATE ONLINE CONTENT (RISKS, MISINFORMATION).
- ENCOURAGE INTENTIONAL, BALANCED, AND SAFE SOCIAL MEDIA/AI USE.
- PROVIDE GUIDANCE ON PROTECTING IDENTITY AND AVOIDING HARMFUL EXPOSURE.

3. EQUITY & ACCESSIBILITY

- ENSURE INTERVENTIONS ARE ACCESSIBLE TO MARGINALIZED OR UNDER-RESOURCED YOUTH.
- RECOGNIZE DISPARITIES IN DIGITAL ACCESS AND DESIGN INCLUSIVE STRATEGIES.



Considerations for Providers-Continued

4. EVIDENCE-BASED INTERVENTION

- USE AI OR ONLINE TOOLS ONLY WHEN SUPPORTED BY RESEARCH.
- AVOID OVER-RELIANCE ON TECHNOLOGY AT THE EXPENSE OF HUMAN CONNECTION.

5. BOUNDARIES & PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

- MAINTAIN PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES IN ONLINE INTERACTIONS.
- BE TRANSPARENT ABOUT PROVIDER ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND LIMITS OF DIGITAL SUPPORT.

6. MONITORING & SUPPORT

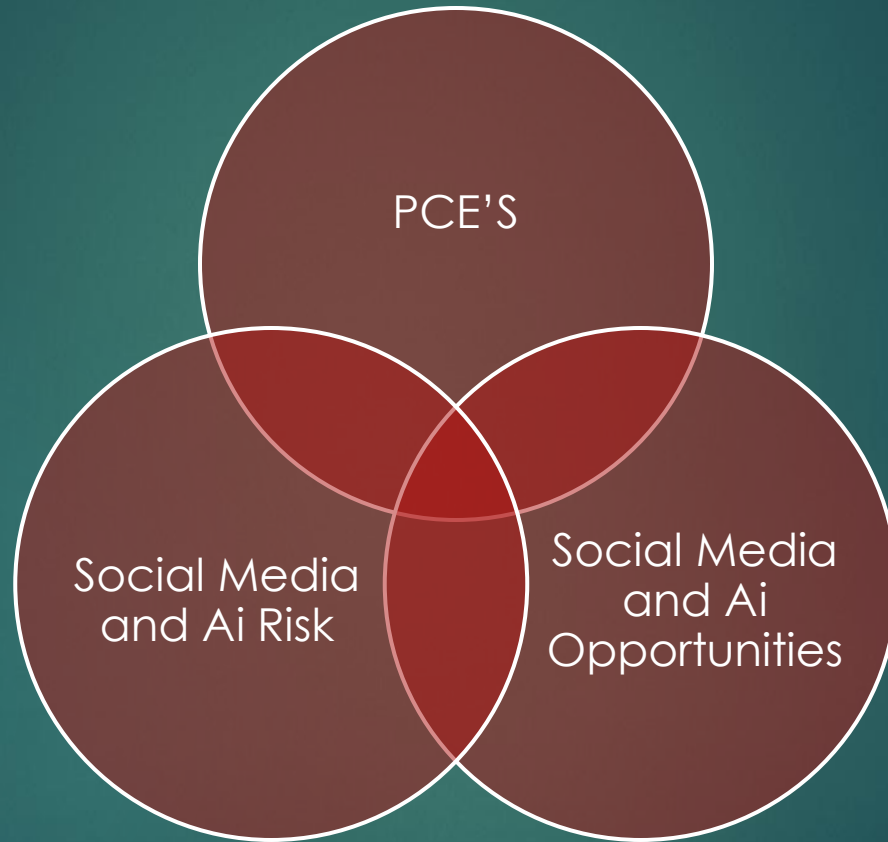
- TRACK YOUTH ENGAGEMENT FOR POTENTIAL RISK SIGNALS (CYBERBULLYING, SUBSTANCE-RELATED CONTENT).
- INTEGRATE DIGITAL STRATEGIES INTO BROADER PREVENTION FRAMEWORKS — NOT IN ISOLATION.

7. CULTURAL & DEVELOPMENTAL SENSITIVITY

- TAILOR GUIDANCE AND CONTENT TO DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE, IDENTITY, AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT.
- RESPECT DIVERSE VALUES, EXPERIENCES, AND PRIVACY NEEDS IN DIGITAL SPACES.



Supportive Framework for working with youth





APPLICATION OF INTERVENTIONS

- **Practical Prevention & Intervention Strategies**
- **Title:** Applying the Framework: Strategies for Youth Support

1. Youth-Focused Strategies

1. Media literacy & critical thinking training
2. Digital self-regulation skills
3. Encouraging positive online communities
4. Mentorship and peer support integration

2. Caregiver / Educator Strategies

1. Guidance on safe AI & social media use
2. Supportive monitoring without over-surveillance
3. Facilitate conversation about online experiences

3. Program / Policy Level

1. Integrate PCE-promoting programs in schools & community centers
2. Design AI & social media platforms with youth wellbeing in mind
3. Collaboration with tech companies for protective features



What To Do: Enhancing PCEs for Youth – Practical Strategies

GOAL: SUPPORT YOUTH RESILIENCE TO SUBSTANCE USE BY PROMOTING SAFE, STRUCTURED, AND CONNECTED EXPERIENCES.

STRATEGIES FOR PROVIDERS:

1. MENTORSHIP & POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

1. Pair youth with supportive adults or peer mentors
2. Encourage regular check-ins and relationship-building activities

2. SKILL-BUILDING & MASTERY

1. Offer workshops on problem-solving, stress management, and goal setting
2. Integrate digital tools (apps, AI chatbots) for skill practice

3. SAFE AND STRUCTURED ENVIRONMENTS

1. Promote supervised extracurriculars, clubs, and community programs
2. Use online platforms for structured virtual activities

4. IDENTITY & POSITIVE EXPRESSION

1. Encourage self-expression via digital media (art, writing, videos)
2. Guide youth to positive online communities that reinforce identity

What to do

INCORPORATING SOCIAL MEDIA & AI GUIDANCE

YOUTH-FOCUSED ACTIVITIES:

- MEDIA LITERACY SESSIONS TO CRITICALLY EVALUATE ONLINE CONTENT
- DIGITAL WELLNESS CHECK-INS (TRACKING SCREEN TIME, EMOTIONAL REACTIONS)
- AI-BASED JOURNALING OR MOOD-MONITORING TOOLS
- GROUP CHALLENGES OR GAMIFIED ACTIVITIES PROMOTING PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR

CAREGIVER-FOCUSED ACTIVITIES:

- GUIDANCE ON SUPPORTIVE MONITORING WITHOUT OVER-SURVEILLANCE
- WORKSHOPS ON CONVERSATION SKILLS ABOUT ONLINE EXPERIENCES
- RESOURCES TO HELP CAREGIVERS IDENTIFY HEALTHY VS RISKY DIGITAL BEHAVIORS

PROGRAM & POLICY INTEGRATION:

- EMBED PCE-PROMOTING ACTIVITIES WITHIN DIGITAL TOOLS AND APPS
- COLLABORATE WITH TECH COMPANIES TO IMPLEMENT YOUTH-SAFE FEATURES
- OFFER BLENDED IN-PERSON + DIGITAL PROGRAMS FOR SKILL-BUILDING