



Essentials for Childhood: A Framework for Positive Childhoods

Case Studies in Implementing the Essentials for Childhood Framework in Two States





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About Prevent Child Abuse America

Prevent Child Abuse America is the nation's oldest and largest organization committed to preventing child abuse and neglect before it happens. We promote programs and resources informed by science to ensure all children and families are living a purposeful and happy life with hope for the future. To learn more about PCA America's work, visit our website at www.preventchildabuse.org.

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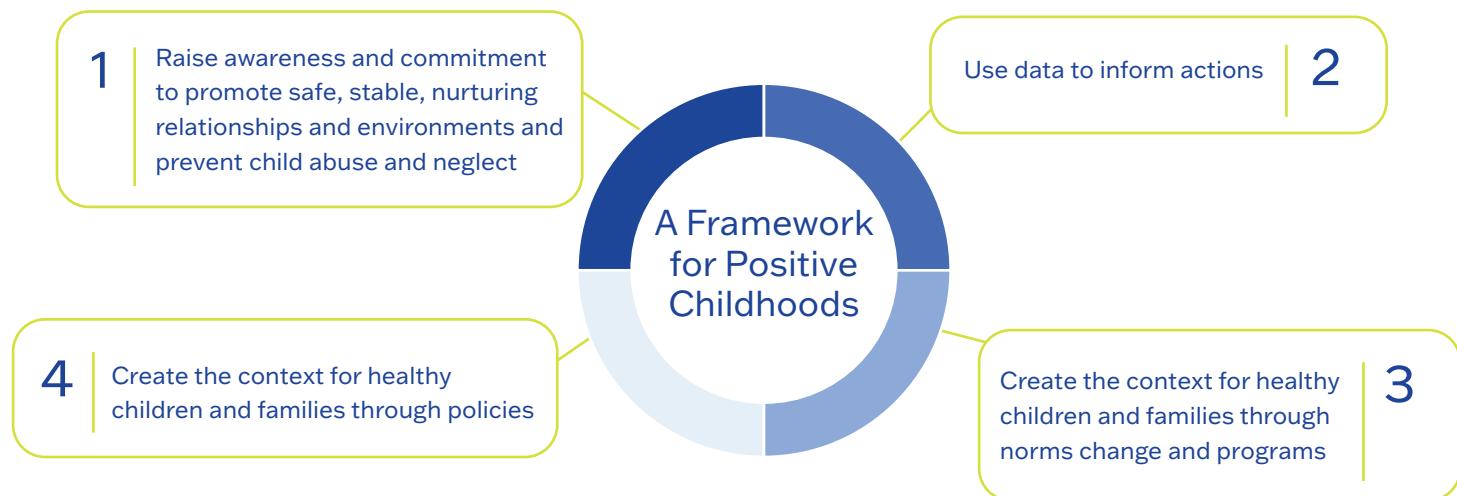
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Essentials for Childhood: A Framework for Positive Childhoods

Child maltreatment constitutes a significant public health issue, yet research shows it is preventable. Ensuring that children experience relationships and environments that are nurturing, safe, and stable is essential for optimal development. Community efforts to foster such conditions contribute to improved health outcomes, reduced expenditures, and decreased involvement in complex systems.

The [Essentials for Childhood](#) (EfC) framework was developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) using a public health approach to provide strategies and goals for communities to help children and families thrive. There are four identified goals within the framework, and while each is important in and of itself, when they are all implemented together, they are more likely to establish the conditions for strong supportive environments and nurturing relationships.¹



Grounded in the belief that safe, stable, and nurturing relationships are crucial to preventing childhood adversity and helping children reach their full potential, the Essentials for Childhood framework is designed for anyone working to promote child and family well-being.

Funding to support state implementation of the Essentials for Childhood framework began in 2013, aligning with the framework's official launch. This financial support has continued, and in 2023, the CDC provided funding to twelve recipients to advance EfC-related initiatives. The initiatives are designed to prevent adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and promote positive childhood experiences (PCEs). The select states and tribes receiving this funding are referred to as "funded" states. Several states implement these efforts without funding from the CDC and are known as "self-supported" states.

In 2024, Prevent Child Abuse America (PCA America) received funding from the CDC through a cooperative agreement to provide strategic support to self-supported states participating in the Essentials for Childhood framework. This included training, technical assistance, and capacity-building tools through a community of practice. The community of practice focuses on organizational capacity, performance improvement, and partnership development to bridge the gap between public health science and community-based action.

PCA America has partnered with Georgia Essentials for Childhood (a funded state) and Maryland Essentials for Childhood (a self-supported state) to develop two case studies that highlight collaborative prevention initiatives that support children and families. The following sections describe the historical context of Essentials for Childhood in each state and illustrate the implementation of these initiatives to promote the well-being of children and families.

Georgia Essentials for Childhood

Georgia Essentials for Childhood is grounded in their work of developing a common approach across multi-disciplinary organizations and stakeholders to align activities, programs, and policies so that all Georgia's children, youth, and their families have safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments. Georgia Essentials for Childhood is part of a comprehensive effort across several states that are using the CDC's Essentials for Childhood framework for child abuse and neglect prevention.



Program History

Georgia's Essentials for Childhood initiative began more than a decade ago when the CDC offered technical assistance and support—though not funding—to help states adopt the Essentials for Childhood framework for creating safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments for children. As an unfunded state, Georgia continued to advance this work through the leadership and vision of Prevent Child Abuse Georgia (PCA GA) and the Georgia Division of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) – Prevention and Community Supports Section, with DFCS serving as the primary funder, ultimately evolving into Georgia Essentials for Childhood (Georgia Essentials) alongside a coalition of partners. Driven by a common goal of preventing child abuse and neglect throughout the state, several state agencies and statewide non-profits, with assistance from an external consulting firm, came together to assess the existing prevention efforts across the state, and their relation to the goals and recommendations of the CDC's Essentials for Childhood Framework. The assessment – which included interviews with state and regional agencies, United Ways, scouting organizations, advocacy organizations, and professional associations – identified several gaps. Intentional efforts focused on elevating community voice and community connections, ensuring local leadership, as well as civic and nonprofit leadership, were included in this collaborative effort.



"Our state plan has sector-specific recommendations. The plan emphasizes that everyone has a role to play in prevention." Beth Florence, Georgia Essentials for Childhood Coordinator

Based on these findings, a set of recommendations and an implementation plan were developed. Georgia Essentials adopted a collective-impact approach, including a shared backbone role consisting of the Georgia Department of Public Health, Injury Prevention Program (DPH IPP); Positive Childhood Alliance Georgia (Prevent Child Abuse Georgia); and the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, Prevention and Community Support Section (DFCS PCS). Georgia Essentials is supported by an external consulting firm (Advantage Consulting) and a part-time project coordinator.

While the initiative pursued its implementation plan through new working groups, many state agencies involved in Georgia Essentials came together to update Georgia's child abuse and neglect prevention plan (CANPP). In addition to organizational and state-level voices, community meetings were held in counties throughout Georgia to bring local perspectives and values into the plan. The resulting document, *A Vision for Child and Family Well-being in Georgia: Our State's Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Plan, 2020–2029*, was officially adopted in March 2020. The plan's priorities emerged from similarities across the state, and they were organized into six aspirations/pillars:



- Family Resilience
- Physical Health
- Mental Health
- Economic Stability
- Early Care and Education
- Awareness of Societal Factors that Contribute to Child Abuse and Neglect (CAN Awareness)

In summer 2020, the Georgia Department of Public Health was awarded support from the CDC's Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences through Data to Action (PACE:D2A) grant program. Georgia Essentials served as an advisory body for the project, and the CANPP was its state action plan. This successful collaboration deepened through Georgia's application and award for the [CDC's subsequent Essentials for Childhood PACE:D2A grant](#), secured in 2022.

Implementation

Georgia Essentials for Childhood brings together diverse organizations with a shared goal of driving systems change to support family well-being across the state. To ensure effective collaboration, the initiative uses a collective action and impact framework, rather than a hierarchical structure, as outlined below:

→ “The purpose of Essentials [for Childhood] isn’t for any one entity to take credit or be in charge. It’s to support the family well-being system.”
Grace Morrow, Georgia Essentials for Childhood, Georgia Department of Public Health Injury Prevention Program

- Backbone agencies – provide administrative and fiscal support
- [Steering Committee](#) – provide coordination of working groups and external mobilization of the work
- [Working Groups of Partners](#) – 5 working groups (Programs & Practices, Policy, Norms and Narratives, Data, & Systems and Structures) that implement the strategic work plans
- [Regional Ambassadors](#) – Organizations representing the 14 DFCS regions throughout the state
- Partners and Champions – Local champions, families/ caregivers, communities

Working within this structure, the backbone agencies – the Georgia Department of Public Health Injury Prevention Program, Positive Childhood Alliance Georgia (PCA GA), and the Georgia DFCS – provide administrative and core organizational support, including oversight of

the CDC grant and fiscal support. A part-time coordinator employed by PCA GA and an external facilitator from Advantage Consulting help to weave the work together across organizational partners. However, the backbone organizations are not the sole decision makers for Georgia Essentials for Childhood, and the Steering Committees also play an important role in making decisions and setting direction for the work.

Georgia is home to a diverse population and geographic landscape, from rural communities to larger urban areas, each with unique strengths and needs that require tailored approaches to support families. When the state prevention plan was developed, care was taken to ensure that it was not a “one size fits all” plan that was disseminated from the top down without meeting the diverse needs of each community. Through the work of regional ambassadors, each state region has developed its own [regional plans and strategies](#) that align with the statewide prevention plan and with the [goals and objectives](#) of Essentials for Childhood. While implementation may vary throughout the regions, all Essentials work is focused on elevating existing efforts to improve conditions and outcomes for Georgia’s children and families.

Relationships and partnerships are a key part of Georgia Essentials for Childhood’s work and are crucial in improving the well-being of children and families through a systems-level, collective impact approach.

Georgia Essentials for Childhood has strategically aligned with core organizations and people who are committed to implementing the shared goals throughout the state. As they continue to move forward to create the conditions for families and children to thrive, one Essentials for Childhood state leader emphasized a need to move toward developing deeper relationships and buy-in from state-level partners and commissioners to lead “systemic change in institutions and public institutions that have a wide reach across the state. [Because] being able to get to the highest levels of these child and family serving state agencies as possible is an accelerant in the work.”

→ “The backbone agencies took a deep dive into (PCA America’s) The Blueprint for Family Well-being.... we now have incorporated it into the state’s CAN prevention plan and EfC.” *Jennifer Stein, Executive Director Positive Childhood Alliance, Georgia*



Successes, Impacts, and Outcomes

Georgia Essentials for Childhood is committed to making data related to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and positive childhood experiences (PCEs) accessible and understandable for anyone working in the child and family well-being systems. This includes the interpretation of data and its connection to evidence-based prevention strategies.

Through their [Essentials for Childhood Data Hub](#), Georgia Essentials for Childhood provides county, state, and national-level data that is available to those with varying data literacy levels. Data indicators align with the state prevention plan and are categorized in a way that can easily be utilized to support the important work being done in the child and family well-being sphere.

With a strong commitment to partnership and uplifting everyone's role in prevention, Georgia Essentials for Childhood has created diverse communication and engagement opportunities for anyone involved in efforts to strengthen families and communities—from teachers to policymakers to grassroots leaders. These strategic communication efforts include unified messaging, newsletters, ACEs Training Modules, events, presentations, annual meetings, and Basecamp: a shared platform for news and connection.

Quick Tips



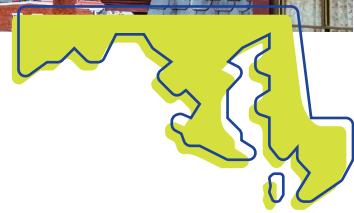
- Identify strategies to facilitate meaningful engagement with the community, ensuring that the relationship provides reciprocal benefits for all partners.
- Appoint a facilitator and a coordinator to integrate project components, and maintain consistent progress, and provide administrative support.
- Establish a strategic alliance with a network of diverse partners to increase access to funding opportunities and strengthen the efforts of the collective.
- Develop a unified purpose among partners that focuses on the development of clear and measurable goals and outcomes.

To learn more about Georgia Essentials for Childhood, [visit their website](#), sign up for the [newsletter](#), or contact the team at Essentials@gsu.edu.



Maryland Essentials for Childhood

Grounded in their vision that all Maryland children, youth, and their families thrive in safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments, Maryland Essentials for Childhood is a statewide collective impact initiative to prevent adverse childhood experiences.



Program History

In 2006, Maryland's State Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (SCCAN) created a committee focused on the prevention of child abuse and neglect. As one of three Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) required citizen review panels in the state, SCCAN was uniquely positioned to create this committee, as they already had representation from a diverse array of actors, including representatives from state child-serving agencies, state legislators, a pediatrician, individuals with personal experience with child maltreatment or involvement in the child welfare system, and members of the general public with interest or expertise in the prevention or treatment of child abuse. The SCCAN prevention committee participated in the CDC's PREVENT Child Maltreatment Institute from 2007-2009 to learn about efforts and evidence-based practices underway at the national level. This led to a broadening of focus to include the reduction of ACEs.

Maryland SCCAN formed a partnership with the University of Maryland School of Social Work to conduct an environmental scan to learn about efforts and evidence-based practices underway at the state level. The data collected highlighted a lack of primary prevention initiatives throughout the state and showed that many of the programs and efforts were not operating through a public health lens with primary prevention at the forefront; rather, child abuse and neglect were being addressed after they had already happened. Furthermore, the prevention efforts taking place across the state were fragmented and uncoordinated.

In response, the SCCAN Prevention Workgroup began reaching out to partners to promote primary prevention and increase participation in the workgroup's meetings. In 2012, SCCAN adopted the CDC Essentials for Childhood Framework to direct their work as an Essentials for Childhood self-supported state. As an unfunded state, SCCAN received technical assistance from the CDC, which allowed them to align their work with the four goals of Essentials for Childhood, determine which agencies and state departments to bring into their work, and build a network of prevention-focused partners throughout the state. SCCAN also began structuring their annual reports for the Governor and General Assembly around the Essentials for Childhood Goals for Primary Prevention.

In 2014, as the network of prevention-focused organizations grew, the SCCAN Prevention Committee expanded and became Maryland Essentials for Childhood. From the beginning, Maryland Essentials for Childhood has relied on partnerships to implement its work throughout the state. Today, supported by three backbone organizations—The Family Tree (the Maryland chapter of Prevent Child Abuse America), Maryland SCCAN and the Maryland Information Network—the Maryland Essentials for Childhood initiative encompasses a diverse array of partner organizations across all sectors: community and grassroots, healthcare, state and local government, business, nonprofit, policy and advocacy foundations, and education and research organizations. Despite navigating COVID, administrative changes, leadership shifts, and funding challenges, these organizations have continued to rally around the well-being of children and families. Their unwavering commitment highlights the collective responsibility communities share in fostering a safer and more nurturing environment for children and families.



Implementation

With funding from the Family Tree, grants from the Maryland Department of Human Services, and a Ms. Foundation grant, Maryland Essentials for Childhood has targeted gaps and data to create a robust prevention portfolio, including child sexual abuse (CSA) prevention, expanded home visiting, state-wide trauma-informed care and education, and the establishment of a medical director for child welfare within the Department of Human Services. Goals and recommendations for primary prevention were included in Maryland SCCAN's annual report to the Governor, the General Assembly, and state agencies to influence state policy and resource allocation decisions related to child welfare and prevention.

Beyond providing information and guidance around primary prevention for the Governor and General Assembly in their annual report, Maryland Essentials for Childhood is actively engaged with their state legislature. Their work with the state government has included speaking at the General Assembly, working with legislators to draft and introduce CSA prevention legislation, holding an education day for legislators, and hosting an "ACEs Roundtable," a networking and education event with child and family-serving agency leaders, legislators, and secretaries of child and family-serving cabinets. Through their purposeful interactions with lawmakers, Maryland Essentials for Childhood has had a high success rate in their public policy initiatives.

Find out more:

[Maryland ACE Interface Training Successes](#)

In addition, Maryland Essentials for Childhood also supports partners in advocating for other child and family-centered state initiatives, such as childcare subsidies, paid family leave, and increasing the state minimum wage. Maryland Essentials for Childhood and The Family Tree provide ACE Interface training and adopted a train-the-trainer model to ensure that individuals across the state could spread knowledge about ACEs.

Whether collaborating with legislators, partners, or community members, Maryland Essentials for Childhood is intentional about framing their work to meet the unique needs and backgrounds of their audiences. Intentionality is key to their work because, as stated by one leader, "while this science-backed work applies to everyone, how they choose to consume it is very different... [Maryland Essentials for Childhood] is incredibly intentional about every piece of this puzzle."

Successes, Impacts, and Outcomes

A key area of impact for Maryland Essentials for Childhood is public policy. They have empowered legislators with education, highlighting the connection between policies like paid family leave and minimum wage and family well-being.

As one leader shared about collaborative groups that focus on policy work, "there is often collective energy, but it's difficult to get across the finish line." They contribute the success of their policy work to their diverse ecosystem of actors, including those who work within the system, who garnered support and united behind shared objectives, the grass-roots community advocates who were on the front lines engaging in conversation, and sharing their stories of impact, and a deep bench of attorneys who helped translate complex legal jargon.

 "I think what's really important in the work, is to know who can lead that (policy) best and sometimes you follow, and sometimes you lead, and people start to respect you as a partner that way."
Claudia Remington, former executive director of Maryland SCCAN.

Included in the policy impact are these three recent examples:



In alignment with the vision and the spirit of intentionality, Maryland Essentials for Childhood developed a robust [website](#) in partnership with FrameWorks Institute. It includes resources and tools that are specifically designed to meet the needs of all partners, families, and policymakers, including:

- In response to the needs of families during the COVID-19 pandemic, a collaborative group pulled together information and supports from over 70 organizations. Today, this comprehensive [database](#) includes 187 programs across the state, providing families and community members with up-to-date resources. Its ongoing importance to the residents of Maryland was highlighted when federal and state workers faced sudden unemployment and relied on these connections for support.
- To remain responsive to the community and families, this collaborative group expanded its efforts and developed the [Brain-Building Toolkit](#), a comprehensive online resource for adults who want to know more about how they can support the healthy development of all children. Information and videos are available in both English and Spanish.



Quick Tips

- Building and sustaining relationships is essential to ensure that everyone has a voice; intentionally creating a safe space for equitable sharing of ideas and contributing to the work.
- Understanding the expertise and influence of partner organizations and identifying those who can take the lead on various policy initiatives.
- Being flexible and adaptable in response to the ever-changing world we live in to meet the needs of children and families.
- Developing messaging and framing communication strategies that are grounded in science and reinforcing primary prevention helps to build a network of support.

Conclusion

Ensuring families have the resources and support they need to thrive is crucial in preventing child abuse and neglect before it happens. Implementing the Essentials for Childhood framework and data-informed prevention strategies demonstrates state-level commitment to strengthening community supports that foster healthy relationships and environments for all children and families to thrive.

Prevent Child Abuse America is committed to building a world where all children and families are living a purposeful and happy life with hope for the future. The work of PCA America is guided by the belief that prevention is possible and the well-being of one is imperative to the well-being and prosperity of all, underscoring the need for a public health approach to primary prevention.

Visit Prevent Child Abuse America's Essentials for Childhood [Resource Page](#) for resources and tools that support the crucial work of preventing child abuse and neglect before it happens!

For More Information

[Essentials for Childhood: Creating safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments for all children](#)

[Promoting Positive Community Norms](#)

[Building Community Commitment for Safe, Stable, Nurturing Relationships and Environments](#)

[Adverse Childhood Experiences Prevention Resources for Action](#)

References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025). *Essentials for childhood framework*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/child-abuse-neglect/php/guidance/index.html>