### **ONTARIO EARLY ADVERSITY AND RESILIENCE FRAMEWORK**

**Building Resilience Together: Empowering Families, Strengthening Communities** 



The visual representation of the framework uses the metaphor of connected communities to show how children, families, and communities can address adversity and build resilience. At the centre is the main goal, representing the heart of the framework. This is surrounded by four key focus areas that target essential aspects of children's development and family well-being. These focus areas show where action is needed and are grounded in a strong foundation made up of ten guiding principles. The principles represent the core values of the framework, providing stability and shaping how actions are carried out. Five pathways to change circle the framework, shown as roads connecting communities. These roads symbolize how change moves and spreads, creating links between people and places. Together, these elements create an integrated and comprehensive approach to building resilience.

#### **FOCUS AREAS**

# SOCIALLY CONNECTED, EQUITABLE, AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES:

Children's health and development are significantly influenced by their immediate social environment, the built and natural environments, and systemic factors shaping those environments.

### REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND PARENTING/CAREGIVING READINESS:

Access to reproductive health services and perinatal support empowers individuals to make informed choices. With the right support, families feel prepared to create safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments for children. Prioritizing perinatal mental health, strengthening support systems, and building knowledge fosters confidence, positive relationships, and long-term well-being.

### SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND RESILIENCE:

Childhood is a fundamental time for the development of lifelong social and emotional competence and resilience which equips children with the skills to manage stress, build healthy relationships, and adapt to challenges.

# RESPONSIVE AND CULTURALLY SAFE PARENTING/CAREGIVING:

Parents/Caregivers are the most important and influential part of a child's life, shaping their overall health and well-being. Providing culturally safe support for families to reduce sources of stress, strengthen core skills, and support responsive relationships can build a strong foundation for children that promotes resilience and reduces adversity.

#### **UNDERSTANDING EARLY ADVERSITY AND RESILIENCE**

**Experiences in childhood have lifelong impacts** 

- Early adversity refers to stressful and potentially traumatic experiences occurring before age 18 that cause an extreme or long-lasting stress response. When children face these stresses without support from caring adults, this can change the way a child's brain and organs develop, and increase the risk of substance use, mental health challenges, chronic disease, and early death. The experience of early adversity can vary between people, but may include abuse, neglect, witnessing domestic violence, and household challenges like caregiver mental health or substance use issues. Adversity also includes broader community and systemic factors such as colonialism, racism, poverty, intergenerational trauma, and neighbourhood violence. Some populations experience more adversity than others.
- **Resilience** is the capacity to stay well despite significant stress or hardship. It is influenced by our genes, relationships with others, life experiences, and environments. Positive experiences and early relationships form the foundation of resilience.
- **Positive childhood experiences** help children develop resilience by providing a sense of safety, belonging, and the ability to navigate challenges. Children thrive when they have safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments, which serve as protective factors against adversity.
- To build **community and family resilience**, foster healthy development and prevent long-term physical and mental health issues, we can enhance protective factors such as responsive parenting/caregiving at the family level, strong social support at the community level, and equitable policies at the societal level.

### **ABOUT THE FRAMEWORK**

This framework was adapted\* by members of the Public Health Ontario Adverse Childhood Experiences and Resilience Community of Practice and consolidates best evidence on the topic into a framework that can be used to facilitate cross-sector collaboration.

#### This framework supports communities and decision-makers in Ontario by:

- Promoting evidence-based strategies at all socio-ecological levels to prevent adversity and promote resilience.
- Explaining complex concepts to make them more accessible and easier to understand.
- Building shared understanding and a common language around the drivers and impacts of adversity, and ways to build community resilience.
- Encouraging community action that fosters collective responsibility and cross-sector partnerships.
- Increasing Impact to strengthen the effectiveness of initiatives that address adversity and resilience.

#### **A CALL TO ACTION**

At the heart of this framework is a call for collective action across sectors to work together to develop innovative and meaningful solutions to prevent adversity, strengthen protective factors, build resilience, and support healing in families and communities.

#### Together, we can:

- Implement evidence-based programs and policies that support resilience.
- Advocate for systemic change and equitable resource allocation.
- Ensure that all children in Ontario have the opportunity to thrive.

Everyone has a role to play in building family and community resilience.

Reflect on your role and make a plan for your next step.

Read the full framework at:

earlyadversityandresilience.ca

