

# HELP THAT HELPS:

## Social Support Matters

Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACEs, are potentially traumatic events that occur during childhood, before the age of 18. ACEs can be any experience that is overwhelming or feels threatening. Experiences such as violence, abuse, and growing up in a family with mental health or substance use problems can be traumatic events to some and not to others. The memories of experiences are stored in our bodies and can change brain development and how the body responds to stress, impacting long-term health outcomes. However, ACEs do not dictate a person's destiny. We know that relationships matter and social connections matter; when we have healthy relationships, we build healthy brains and communities. Positive connectedness helps us cope and even thrive through tough times.

### DEFINITIONS

#### Resilience

is the ability to adapt, cope and thrive despite tough times. Feeling social and emotional support, having two or more people who help, having community reciprocity, and bridging our social circles are ways we can build resilience.

#### Social Cohesion

relates to how members of society are connected and united, and the strength of relationships and the sense of solidarity among members of a community. It occurs when people cooperate despite differences. It opens gateways of opportunities to members of society and fosters positive social mobility towards each other's well-being.

#### Civic Engagement

encompasses a wide range of formal and informal activities, such as voting, volunteering, participating in group activities, and community gardening.

### RESILIENCE FACTORS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE




#### Feeling Social/Emotional Support and Hopeful

Connecting with a family member or introducing yourself to someone you've never met before leads to better health and outcomes for all. Individuals with higher levels of support are more likely to engage in protective behaviors and develop positive health outcomes. People show emotional support by offering genuine encouragement, reassurance, and compassion. Engaging in a faith community, neighborhood, or community activities, and even pets, provides emotional support.

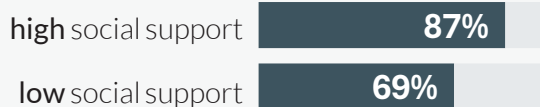



## Having Two or More People Who Help

All adults need help sometimes. Having individuals who can provide concrete support in times of need can help to minimize the impact of stress caused by a challenge or adversity. When basic needs are met, our minds and bodies can start to feel safe, we can regulate emotions, and even set priorities. Asking for help is not easy to do and can sometimes feel embarrassing. Understanding rights in accessing services, knowledge of relevant services, and how to navigate the services available helps empower a person to ask for help when it is needed.

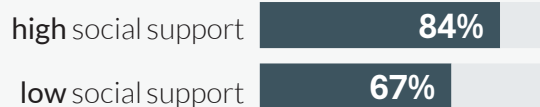
**1.3x** more likely to have  
 **GOOD MENTAL HEALTH**<sup>1</sup>

% with **good mental health** in the last month, by social support level



**1.3x** more likely to have  
 **GOOD GENERAL HEALTH**<sup>1</sup>

% with **good general health** in the last month, by social support level

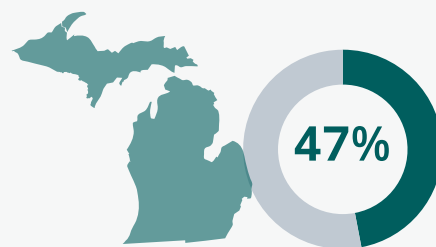


## Community Reciprocity

It can feel good to give back in your community, to create feelings of mutual respect and appreciation for building social connectedness and it can help an adult with trauma heal.

The “give and take” within healthy relationships and in our community can include an exchange of actions like watching someone’s child while they go to the store, or an exchange of goods and services like taking a meal to your neighbor when they are sick. Helping rake someone’s lawn, shoveling the snow off their sidewalk, or sitting down and enjoying a cup of tea with them are all moments where we “give and take”.

When someone reciprocates our efforts, it can leave us feeling validated in our choices and friendship, energized to continue investing in our relationships, and even gives us a feeling of value and appreciation.



of Michigan residents report that they  
**DO FAVORS FOR THEIR NEIGHBORS**<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Michigan Behavioral Risk Factor Survey, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> US Census, Current Population Survey, 2019.

In a recent study<sup>3</sup>, it was found that when individuals within community's exchange goods and services, and giving and receiving becomes the norm, that generosity leads to further generosity. This generosity provides a sense of interdependence and reliability to the culture of giving and receiving thus increasing trust, generosity, and investment into others and one's own community.

## Social Bridging

It can be easy to slip into a routine and concern for your own household and family. When we reach beyond our own household and family and create connections that bridges us to others, we create a sense of community connection and belonging that increases access to information, resources, and other groups or individuals not previously known. Civic engagement has been linked to an individuals' socioeconomic status, boosts healthy functioning, and provides a psychological benefit of "mattering" to their community. In a recent study, when youth<sup>4</sup> were provided an opportunity to volunteer and participate in the voting process, they exhibited fewer health-risk behaviors and reported better mental health. Social bridging can increase tolerance and acceptance of different people, values and beliefs. It can also help us to reach beyond our own inner circle of family and friends to access the resources we need.

## WORKING TOGETHER TO BUILD SOCIAL SUPPORTS FOR THOSE IN NEED

The resilience of an individual can be dependent in large part on their relationships and community. The more we learn about resilience the more we recognize that it is the systems around us that influence the ability of both children and adults to be resilient. When we are faced with adversity, resilience means we can navigate life well and actively participate in the prevention of ACEs for future generations. Imagine the impact we can have when we decrease health care costs, lower crime rates, and decrease social problems. ACEs do not dictate our destiny. When we work together, we can increase social cohesion and help those around us and ourselves, not just survive but thrive.

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<sup>3</sup>Whitham, M. M. (2021). Generalized Generosity: How the Norm of Generalized Reciprocity Bridges Collective Forms of Social Exchange. *American Sociological Review*, 86(3), 503–531. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00031224211007450>

<sup>4</sup>Ballard PJ, Hoyt LT, Pachucki MC. Impacts of Adolescent and Young Adult Civic Engagement on Health and Socioeconomic Status in Adulthood. *Child Development*. 2019;90(4):1138-1154.

*Infographic design by Michigan Public Health Institute based on weighted prevalence estimates among Michigan's adult population provided by Michigan Department of Education and Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Lifecourse Epidemiology and Genomics. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official view of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.*



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