

Connectedness



School belonging or school connectedness is the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the school environment. It is the belief by students that adults in their school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals.

Research indicates that students who feel more connected to their school, teachers and peers generally enjoy better academic outcomes, as well as healthier bodies and minds. Students who feel connected to school have more educational motivation, classroom engagement and good attendance. They are also less likely to show disruptive behaviours.

Safety—physical and psychological

Knowledge/ acceptance of individual

Feeling safe to be yourself

How do you create a sense of belonging and security in your classroom



In-group membership

Relationships with peers and adults

How do you incorporate your knowledge of individual students, their personalities and their interests into your classroom and your lessons



Many students feel physically and/or emotionally unsafe in school, but adults tend to underestimate the extent to which this is the case.

Seating plans which do not offer students the opportunity to sit near someone they trust can particularly make students feel unsafe emotionally.

Children who feel especially disconnected from school can sometimes develop 'sole responsibility narratives' where they feel entirely responsible for their situations, and nobody else, teachers or peers, can help.

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Students report that teachers should be fun, fair and willing to listen to their concerns.

The most effective strategies for increasing the likelihood that students feel connected in school include:

- High expectations
- Fair and consistent behaviour policies
- Trusting relationships between students, and between students and teachers
- Ensuring that every student feels close to at least one adult in school

Many factors influence students' sense of belonging:

- Academic motivation
- Personal characteristics
- Emotional stability
- Gender
- Support networks

Peer support is a fundamental aspect of belonging.

Boys are less likely to seek help from teachers, instead relying on friendship groups to resolve issues.

Extra curricular activities help in the building of friendship groups—but many are not accessible to those who feel most disconnected from school.

Students also value the individual quirks of their teachers, and seemingly small things like shared jokes can have a profound impact on their feelings of inclusion

Summary

- Feeling safe and included is crucial for children's academic and social development
- Teachers can have the single biggest impact on individual students.
- All schools have a number of students who feel they cannot turn to anyone for support

Further reading

- Allen, K. & Kern, M. (2017) *School belonging in adolescents: Theory, research and practice*. Singapore: Springer
- Cumming, T., Marsh, R. & Higgins, K. (2018) *School Connectedness for students with disabilities: From theory to evidence-based practice*. Oxon: Routledge