

Benefits of a positive school climate:

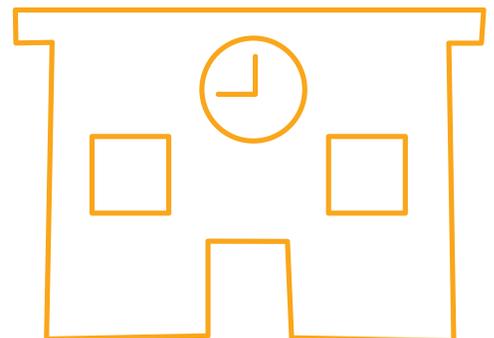
- motivation
- belonging
- engagement in learning
- resilience
- kindness
- positive outlook

## SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

A child’s school experiences are a critical predictor for their personal well-being and academic success. When children have positive experiences at school they are more likely to feel they belong within their school, feel more motivated and engaged in class and achieve higher academic performance. The MDI asks children their perceptions related to: academic self-concept, school climate, school belonging and experiences with peer victimization. Additionally, the Grade 7 MDI includes questions about motivation and future goals. Children’s responses related to these concepts help adults understand what types of experiences children are having within their schools, and can direct adults to know the best ways to provide a safe, caring, and supportive environment where all children can thrive.

## research

- Children with a positive view of their academic abilities tend to have greater motivation and goals for the future. Children and adolescents who attend schools that are focused on developing all aspects of the child (academic, social, and emotional) feel more positive about school, achieve at higher levels, are more likely to graduate and are more likely to succeed in college (Darling-Hammond, 2015).
- Feelings of belonging are associated with lower emotional distress, the reduction of negative behaviours (such as bullying and mental health issues) and are associated to rates of higher resilience later in life (van Harmelen et al., 2016).
- Teaching prosocial behaviors (such as empathy, sharing, cooperation) allows a school to build a system built upon principles of respect, responsibility, fairness, and honesty. Within such systems, desirable behaviors increase and students feel safe. Discipline is approached using restorative measures, teaching social problem solving, rather than resorting to damaging punitive measures (Bear, Whitcomb, Elias, & Blank, 2015).
- Children’s perception of kindness within a school is a consistent indicator of positive school climate. Students who see kind behaviours in students, teachers, and staff also describe their school environments as being safe and encouraging places to learn (Binfet, Gadermann, & Schonert-Reichl, 2015).
- The development of social competencies is crucial to a child’s well-being. Children who exhibit prosocial behaviours, such as kindness and altruism, are more likely to have friends and feel a sense of belonging. They are also less likely to be victimized (Guhn, Schonert-Reichl, Gadermann, Hymel, & Hertzman, 2013).



SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

A complete list of action ideas resources can be downloaded at [discovermdi.ca/resources](https://discovermdi.ca/resources)

at home

- Ask your child to describe the qualities of their school that support their well-being and develop a sense of community. Then discuss with your child ways to build relationships with their teachers, peers, and other people within the school community.
- Develop an action plan with your child that outlines the ways that they can (and wish to) become more involved in their school community.
- Use restorative practices, such as the collaborative problem-solving approach, when teaching consequences to your child so that they can maintain a sense of social connectedness while taking responsibility for their actions.
- Practice prosocial behaviour yourself – your example of kind, inclusive behaviour towards others will serve as a powerful source of inspiration to your child about the types of skills they are learning in school that promote a sense of community.
- Check in with your child’s teacher and school on a regular basis. Let them know that you are invested in the school community. If available, volunteer for school functions.

in school

- With students, create a classroom or schoolwide constitution that outlines the values they feel are important when creating a classroom or school environment where everyone is welcome and all can learn. Questions to consider during this dialogue may include:
  - What rules and values do we agree to follow as a class this year?
  - How can we help one another keep these values and maintain an environment of respect and community?
  - How can we ensure everyone in our class feels respected and included?
  - How will we restore community and respect in our classroom if challenges need to be addressed?
- Provide faculty, caregivers, and community with training on how to develop connection with each other and students.
- Notice the messages your school environment may be providing children about the school climate. Is the school trophy case the first thing you see when you walk in the school door? What message does this send to students?

in the community

- Ask children how they want to contribute to their community. Every child has something to offer others and can gain a sense of competence, belonging and mastery when they are able to make an impact in an area they care about.
- Create an action plan in collaboration with your local school to support the needs of your community. Identify the areas that your community organization can address to help support greater community connection and the development of a positive community climate.
- Negative peer experiences often occur out of sight of adults, including during after-school times. After-school program and activity staff should be trained about how to create a positive peer climate. Being able to identify children’s vulnerabilities should be a focus of training, such as recognizing when children are stressed, socially victimized or experiencing trauma.