

CONNECTEDNESS

important adult(s) at school, neighbourhood and home

peer belonging

friendship intimacy

important adults

Connectedness is a fundamental need of children and is a protective asset that has the strongest association with children's health and well-being. Close social relationships and a sense of belonging with adults and peers at home, in school and in the community cultivate important connections. Having even just one adult who cares about them, listens to them and believes in them can make a powerful difference in a child's life.

Middle childhood (ages 9 to 12) is a time in which healthy peer relationships become very important. Equally important to well-being and healthy development is feeling connected to parents and caregivers. Having many strong and supportive social connections can help minimize other risks in a child's life and their lifelong well-being

research

- A study of the MDI results of more than 5000 Canadian students found that having a sense of belonging among one's peers and a supportive relationship with adults at home and school were the most important aspects related to children's satisfaction with life, even more so than family income or personal health (Gadermann et al., 2016).

WITH ADULTS

- Supportive relationships children have with the adults in their school and community offer protection from the harmful effects of stress and improve self-esteem. Children with close relationships with adults experience fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression and show less problem behaviour (Guhn et al., 2013).
- Teachers who emphasize progress goals, personal mastery and self-motivation foster greater respectful and positive peer environments (Wang et al., 2016)

WITH PEERS

- Social competencies and friendship building skills can buffer children against victimization, anxiety and depression (Guhn et al., 2013).
- Children who do not feel part of a group or feel cast out by their own group are at risk of anxiety and depression. They are also at higher risk of low school attendance and future school drop-out. (Viega et al., 2014)

WITH FAMILY

- Emotional attunement between the parent and child continues to be important through middle childhood and adolescence as it buffers against risks and promotes well-being. When parents provide a secure, supportive and reliable home base, their children tend to have fewer behaviour and emotional difficulties (Oldfield et al., 2016).



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A complete list of action ideas resources can be downloaded at discovermdi.ca/resources

at home

- Ask children: “What do you love the most about our family? What family activities do you enjoy the most? What do you want our family to do more of?”
- When children show problem behaviors, it is helpful if caregivers focus on regulating their own emotions first so that they do not act out of anger or frustration. Recognize that children need caring and comfort when they are struggling and acting out. Respond with sensitivity and constructive boundary setting rather than punishment.
- Create family traditions and a strong cultural identity. Take part in community celebrations while exploring openness towards other cultures.
- Engage in creative play that your child initiates. By giving them your time and your full undivided attention, you may get to know their perspective and needs.

in school

- Ask students: “What are the three things that adults in the school do to show that they respect and believe in you? What are three things that you wish they would do?”
- Teachers who have optimistic views of their students and provide encouragement can positively impact students’ performance.
- When students feel shame, it shuts down their learning. If students are acting out, practice empathy and ask students how they are feeling. Find out what else is going on in their lives that might be affecting their behaviour, and show that you care.
- Create a consistent way to check in with each student on a regular basis. For example, spend 2 minutes per day for 10 days connecting one-on-one with a student.

in the community

- Ask children: “When and where after school do you feel most like yourself and proud to be you?”
- Model empathy, helping and sharing behaviours in community programs to increase your participants’ peer acceptance. If you are unconditionally kind and understanding to all students regardless of their behaviour, their peers are likely to follow your lead.
- Ensure community opportunities are inclusive to all children and families by providing universal programming.
- Promote programs and services in your community that offer opportunities for mentorship. Consider Big Brothers/Big Sisters, the YWCA/YMCA, local peer mentor programs, and cultural organizations.