



Information for Parents and Families

Helping Your Child Feel Connected to School

As a parent, you want your child to do well in school. You also want your child to be healthy and avoid behaviors that are risky or harmful. Through your guidance and support, you can have great influence on your child's health and learning. But you also have important allies in this effort—the caring adults in your child's school.

Research shows that students who feel a genuine sense of belonging at school are more likely to do well in school, stay in school, and make healthy choices. This sense of belonging is often described as *school connectedness*. Connected students believe their parents, teachers, school staff, and other students in their school care about them and about how well they are learning.

Why is it important for your child to feel connected to school?

Scientists who study youth health and behavior have learned that strong connections at school can help young people

- Get better grades
- Have higher test scores
- Stay in school longer
- Attend school more regularly

In addition, students who feel connected to their school are less likely to

- Smoke cigarettes
- Drink alcohol
- Have sexual intercourse
- Carry a weapon or become involved in violence
- Be injured from drinking and driving or not wearing seat belts
- Have emotional distress or eating disorders
- Consider or attempt suicide



What can you do to increase your child's connection to school?

Here are some actions that you can take, at home and at school, to help your child become more connected to his or her school:

1. Encourage your child to talk openly with you, teachers, counselors, and other school staff about his or her ideas, needs, and worries.
2. Find out what the school expects your child to learn and how your child should behave in school by talking to teachers and staff, attending school meetings, and reading information the school sends home. Then, support these expectations at home.
3. Help your child with homework, and teach your child how to use his or her time well. Make sure your child has the tools—books, supplies, a quiet place to work—he or she needs to do homework at home, at the library, or at an afterschool program.
4. Encourage your child to help adults at home, at school, and in the community, such as helping with chores, serving as a library aide, volunteering at a hospital or clinic, or tutoring younger students after school.
5. Read school newsletters, attend parent-teacher-student conferences, and check out the school's Web site to learn what is going on at the school. Encourage your child to participate in school activities.
6. Meet regularly with your child's teachers to discuss his or her grades, behavior, and accomplishments.
7. Ask teachers if your child can participate in or lead parent-teacher conferences.
8. As your schedule allows, help in your child's classroom, attend afterschool events, or participate in a school committee, such as a health team or parent organization. Ask whether your school offers babysitting or transportation for parents who need them.
9. Offer to share important aspects of your culture with your child's class.
10. If your first language is not English, ask for materials that are translated into the language you speak at home, and ask for interpreters to help you at school events.
11. Learn whether community organizations provide dental services, health screenings, child care, or health promotion programs at school. If not, advocate having those services offered at your school or in your school district.
12. Get involved with your child's school to help plan school policies and school-wide activities.
13. Ask whether your school or school district provides—or could offer—programs or classes to help *you* become more involved in your child's academic and school life. For example, the school or school district might offer
 - Training to help you talk with your child and to help manage his or her behavior.
 - Programs to help you to talk with your child's teachers and help your child learn.
 - Educational programs for parents by telephone or online.
 - General Education Development (GED), English as a second language, or other classes to help you work better with your child and with the adults at school.
14. Talk with teachers and school staff to suggest simple changes that can make the school a more pleasant and welcoming place. For example, the school might decorate the eating area with student-made posters, allow families to use the school gym or other facilities during out-of-school times, or create a place in the school or on school grounds for kids and families to socialize.



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention
and Health Promotion
Division of Adolescent and School Health
www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth

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Resources

School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors Among Youth

www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/AdolescentHealth/connectedness.htm

Student Health and Academic Achievement

www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/health_and_academics/index.htm

FindYouthInfo.gov

www.findyouthinfo.gov

Enhancing Student Connectedness to Schools

<http://csmh.umaryland.edu/resources.html/caring%20connectedness%20brief.pdf>

School Connectedness: Improving Students' Lives

<http://cecp.air.org/download/MCMonographFINAL.pdf>