

## Helping Your Child Feel Connected to School

Evidence shows that positive and caring relationships fuel student success.

- ▶ Your guidance and support are key to your children doing well in school, being healthy, and choosing positive behaviours.
- ▶ Education staff can also be important partners in helping your children feel a sense of belonging at school – which is often described as *school connectedness*.

Connected students believe their families, teachers, and school staff care about them and are partners in helping them feel safe, valued, and capable of achieving great things.

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

- ▶ Helping students feel connected is one of the most important ways schools and families can improve student attendance. Students come to school more regularly when school is a place they want to be.
- ▶ When students feel that school staff care about their education and well-being and feel a strong sense of belonging, it leads to higher student performance, greater motivation, safer learning spaces, improved student behaviour, and lower school drop-out rates.
- ▶ There is more and more research showing that students experience improved health outcomes when they believe adults in the school care about them.
- ▶ Studies show that high levels of school and family connectedness help students who have exceptionalities feel less emotional distress and improves their overall well-being.

## What Can Families Do?

Families can take important actions at home and with the school to help build their children's feeling of connectedness.

1. Encourage your child to talk openly with you, their teachers, counselors, and other school staff about their ideas, needs, and any worries they might have.
2. Find out what the school expects your child to learn and how your child should behave in school. You and the school can work together to help your child meet expectations, which impacts their "connectedness." Meet regularly with your child's teachers to discuss their grades, behaviour, and accomplishments. *You know your child better than anyone else and your input is key.*
3. Try to help your child access the books, supplies, and a quiet space they need to do their homework. This might be at home or possibly at an afterschool program or community space. If you need assistance, reach out to the school so they can help.
4. Encourage your child to help others in your community. Volunteering and community service build students' self-esteem, self-confidence, and feelings of connectedness.
5. Read school newsletters, attend parent-teacher-student conferences, and follow the schools' social media messages so you keep up with the latest news. When your child sees that you are interested in school events, they will feel like their school and family are working together to help them succeed.
6. Encourage your child to participate in school activities. Students who participate in extra-curricular activities are more likely to feel part of the school community.
7. When you can, help in your child's classroom, attend school events, participate in a school committee, or offer to share your cultural understandings in the school or classroom. When students see their families in the school, they feel a stronger sense of connection.
8. Ask your school to offer programs or classes that would help you become more involved in your child's education. For example, families might benefit from the following.
  - Ideas for talking with children and teens about critical topics, such as Internet safety, screen time, health and wellness issues ...
  - Information about how to help children and teens learn.
  - Opportunities to ask about school programs, assessment approaches, report cards, etc.

9. Suggest simple changes that can make the school a more pleasant, culturally-relevant, and welcoming place. For example:
  - Do you think families would enjoy a space in the school for them to come and meet with each other or with school staff?
  - What do you think could increase attendance at school events?
  - What kinds of cultural and on-the-land activities would you recommend for students? Students are more successful when schools reflect who they are.
10. Help your child communicate to the school what works best for their learning. Some students know what will help them feel like they belong at school, but they might not know how to share that understanding. When schools know what students want and need, they are better able to respond.

Your ideas are important. You can feel confident about your special and unique understandings.

**What you do matters. You can help your school make sure all students feel like they are part of a learning community. And that will help all students achieve and succeed.**

Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Interventions. <https://encouragehopeandhelp.com>. Connectedness-Parents.pdf

## The Voices of First Nations Parents

Input provided at November 2024 Capacity Building Sessions for First Nations Parents

### What can SCHOOLS do to help students feel connected to school?

- ☐ Host a welcome circle every morning with drumming, singing, and prayer.
- ☐ Bring culture into the school and use land-based learning opportunities.
- ☐ Create culturally safe spaces for students.
- ☐ Focus on relationship building.
- ☐ Host staff versus student sporting events.
- ☐ Encourage student involvement in school activities, such as music, plays ...
- ☐ Greet every student, and check in on them throughout the day. Know and use students' names.
- ☐ Organize a homework club and tutoring so kids feel successful.
- ☐ Model good behaviour and teach social emotional skills.
- ☐ Make sure the school is safe and accepting of everyone.
- ☐ Meet students where they are and help them get where they want to be.
- ☐ Acknowledge and celebrate student's achievements.
- ☐ Be adaptable (flexible with students).
- ☐ Focus on community engagement; come to the community to meet people and have fun.
- ☐ Ask students for feedback about how they feel at school.

**What can FAMILIES do to help students feel connected to school?**

- ☐ Ask kids questions about their day.
- ☐ Be as involved as possible. Connect yourself. Role model connections.
- ☐ Encourage attendance and involvement in clubs.
- ☐ Show up! Show interest. Participate in school activities, assemblies, concerts, awards days ...
- ☐ Check-in with students to see if they feel safe at school. Do they have a sense of security?
- ☐ Wear school swag. Show school spirit! Talk positively about education. Help students feel proud of their school.
- ☐ Reach out to the teacher; communicate with the school about how our kids are doing and what they need.
- ☐ Help with after-school activities, or create programs of interest if possible – such as language and culture clubs.
- ☐ Help out with school meals or events.
- ☐ Read school communications and ask questions.
- ☐ Support a positive start in the morning.
- ☐ Help kids set out good intentions for the day.
- ☐ Demonstrate excitement about our children's learning.