

School Connectedness – A Key Protective Factor

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Strong Connections at School Can Lead to Healthier Choices



Students who feel connected to their school are more likely to engage in healthy behaviors and succeed academically.



What helps young people make healthy lifestyle choices, resist drugs and alcohol, avoid unsafe sex, or succeed in school? The answers aren't simple, and many factors are likely involved, including effective parenting, stable and healthy living conditions, and individual character traits. Scientists are increasingly interested in examining those factors—often called protective factors—to understand which characteristics or situations are most likely to help teens make safer, healthier choices.

One particularly promising protective factor is *school connectedness*, which refers to the belief by students that the adults and peers at their school care about their learning and about them as individuals. A growing body of research indicates that students who feel connected to their school are more likely to engage in healthy behaviors and succeed academically.

What Does the Research Say?

A long-term national study of more than 36,000 adolescents examined the effects of various protective factors—such as school connectedness, parent-family connectedness, parental expectations for academic achievement, and youth involvement in religious activities—on the health and well-being of young people. The findings on school connectedness are striking:

- Of all the protective factors examined, school connectedness was found to be the strongest protector against substance use, school absenteeism, early sexual initiation, violence, and risk of unintentional injury (such as drinking and driving or not wearing seat belts). [1]
- School connectedness was second in importance, after family connectedness, in protecting adolescents from emotional distress, eating disorders, and suicidal ideation and attempts. [1,2,3]

Research also shows a strong relationship between school connectedness and educational outcomes, [4-8] including school attendance; [6] staying in school longer; [7] and higher grades and classroom test scores. [5,8] In turn, students who do well academically are less likely to engage in such risky behaviors as smoking cigarettes, carrying weapons, drinking alcohol, or having sexual intercourse. [9,10]

What Can Schools and Families Do to Foster School Connectedness?



Our knowledge about school connectedness is evolving, but early research reveals several factors that can help increase students' sense of connectedness. These include

- Adult support from dedicated, attentive school administrators, teachers, and staff
- Belonging to a positive, stable peer group
- Commitment to education on the part of both students and adults
- A safe school environment and supportive psychosocial climate

To help schools enhance this important protective factor, CDC scientists have created a guide that synthesizes available research on school connectedness and outlines strategies for fostering it. [*School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors Among Youth*](#) identifies **six evidence-based strategies** that teachers, administrators, school staff, and parents can implement to increase the extent to which students feel connected to school:

1. Create decision-making processes that facilitate student, family and community engagement; academic achievement; and staff empowerment.
2. Provide education and opportunities to enable families to be actively involved in their children's academic and school life.
3. Provide students with the academic, emotional, and social skills necessary to be actively engaged in school.
4. Use effective classroom management and teaching methods to foster a positive learning environment.
5. Provide professional development and support for teachers and other school staff to enable them to meet the diverse cognitive, emotional, and social needs of children and adolescents.

6. Create trusting and caring relationships that promote open communication among administrators, teachers, staff, students, families, and communities.

To help schools put these strategies into place, the guide suggests specific actions for each strategy.

More Information

- [School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors Among Youth](#)
- [Student Health and Academic Achievement](#)
- [Adolescent Health](#)
- [Healthy Youth](#)
- [FindYouthInfo.gov](#)

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