



What the MDI Measures

Adults in School
Adults in the Neighbourhood
Adults at Home
Peer Belonging
Friendship Intimacy
Important Adults

CONNECTEDNESS

Experiencing a sense of connectedness at home, in school, and in the community is an important component of healthy and positive development in childhood and early adolescence (Oberle et al., 2014; Masten, 2018). For a child, feeling connected equates to feeling supported, safe, respected, as well as experiencing belonging to an individual or a group (Arslan & Allen, 2021). Middle childhood and adolescence are periods when individuals begin to develop a sense of who they are. Friendships and peer acceptance gain importance for children. Equally important to children's well-being and healthy development is feeling connected to parents and guardians (Collins & Madsen, 2019), and teachers (Schonert-Reichl, 2019). Having many strong and supportive social connections can help promote resilience and minimize other risks in a child's life (Mahoney et al., 2021).

research

GENERAL RESEARCH ON CONNECTEDNESS

- Connectedness with peers has been associated with higher levels of life satisfaction and self-esteem, lower levels of depressive symptoms, and better educational outcomes in early adolescence (Arslan et al., 2018; Oberle et al., 2018).
- Children who feel a sense of belonging with peers report better emotion regulation, as well as motivation to succeed at school (Allen et al., 2022)
- Connectedness with adults at home, school and the community is related to positive mental health, more resilience and thriving, and lower levels of internalizing symptoms (Eugene, 2021; Klinck et al., 2020).

MDI FINDINGS ON CONNECTEDNESS

- On the 2022/23 MDI, about 70% of children reported having a close friend, and 58% felt a sense of belonging with peers at school. 62% of children felt connected to adults at school and 78% felt connected to an adult at home.
- According to MDI data, children who felt connected to peers and adults also reported higher life satisfaction, self-esteem and were more likely to thrive (Thomson et al., 2018).
- Researchers found that connectedness was a protective factor during the COVID-19 pandemic and children who felt more connected on all dimensions had the highest levels of well-being during the pandemic (Oberle et al., 2023).



CONNECTEDNESS

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?”
- When children show problem behaviours, 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 (Moretti et al., 2015).
- Create family traditions and a strong cultural identity while being open towards other cultures. Take part in community celebrations (Ungar, 2015).

IN COMMUNITY

- Ask children: “Who do you feel supported by? Who do you go to when you need help?” Help them identify supportive adults in the community.
- Model empathy, helping, and sharing behaviours in community programs to increase your participants’ peer acceptance. If you are unconditionally kind and understanding to all children regardless of their behaviour, their peers are likely to follow your lead (Wang et al. 2016).
- Ensure community opportunities are inclusive to all children and families by providing universal programming (Vinoski et al., 2016).
- Host evidence-based mentorship programs, such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Mentorship programs promote positive social, emotional, behavioural, and academic outcomes (DuBois et al., 2011).

AT SCHOOL

- Create a lesson to explore self-identity. Allow children to go through an identity discovery exercise to find commonalities with other students to foster belonging (White, 2019). Teach children to respect and celebrate all identities to create an atmosphere of safe learning (Farmer et al., 2019).
- Offer explicit instruction and practice of social skills by integrating social and emotional learning (SEL) into your classroom (Schonert-Reichl, 2019). Children with positive social skills are less likely to experience present and future problems with peers (Ma et al., 2020).
- Consider a community project for your class that provides a community service needed in your area. Community engagement in teaching is associated with higher social emotional skills and more civic involvement for students (Gartland, 2021).
- If children are demonstrating problematic behaviours, lead with compassion and ask children how they are feeling as a way to understand why they are behaving in the way they are. Find out what else is going on in their lives that might be affecting their behaviour and show that you care. Shaming or punishing children for their behaviour can have a negative impact on your relationship and shut down learning (Dewar, 2017).
- Consider using a collaborative planning solution (CPS) model for challenging behaviours. More resources can be found [here](#).

For more resources and ideas on how to use MDI data to catalyze action, visit discovermdi.ca.

references

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WEBSITE RESOURCES

Collaborative Planning Solutions by Dr. Ross Greene. <https://livesinthebalance.org/>