A DIY WORKBOOK ON
SCHOOL BELONGING

Belonging Matters: Strategies and Solutions to Building School Belonging for Adolescents

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*This handout contains an exert from the **free** to download **Building Better Schools**.*
Access the book at drkellyallen.com

Strategies to Build Belonging

What does belonging mean to you?

FAST FRIENDS SET 1:

1. Given the choice of anyone in the world, whom would you want as a dinner guest?

2. Would you like to be famous? In what way?

3. Before making a telephone call, do you ever rehearse what you are going to say? Why?

4. What would constitute a "perfect" day for you?

5. When did you last sing to yourself? To someone else?

6. If you were able to live to the age of 90 and retain either the mind or body of a 30-year-old for the last 60 years of your life, which would you want?

7. Do you have a secret hunch about how you will die?

8. Name three things you and your partner appear to have in common.

9. For what in your life do you feel most grateful?

10. If you could change anything about the way you were raised, what would it be?

11. Take four minutes and tell your partner your life story in as much detail as possible.

12. If you could wake up tomorrow having gained any one quality or ability, what would it be?

Purpose is fun. Uncomfortable questions can be skipped. Just have fun. No right or wrong.

What strategies do you think work best for teachers to improve belonging in the classroom?

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What strategies do you think work best for school leaders to improve belonging?

What strategies do you think work best for improving belonging at the school climate level?

What strategies have you used to build belonging for yourself? For colleagues?

What strategies have you used to build belonging for parents?

School Belonging Policy of Guidelines

HOW TO USE

School belonging as a concept is unique to school environments and is influenced by a range of factors including school climate, cultural processes, broader societal issues, and historical/current events. A policy on school belonging enables school communities to develop collaborative engagement with staff, students, and families. School networks also have a significant role to play in helping create the conditions for belonging. This policy is structured to allow users to adapt it in a manner that serves the local, immediate demands of their contexts.

Policies are most effective when they are known and implemented by the people who are their intended audience. For a policy on school belonging, it is recommended that effort is invested into ensuring that key stakeholders (e.g., students, parents, school staff, and community members) have a sense of agency and voice, and a role in shaping the policy content.

The process of refining the school belonging policy in this way will be as important as the policy itself. School leaders should ensure that policies are embedded in day-to-day practices by using them in practical and tangible ways. A policy on school belonging could be incorporated into school rules, displayed as a poster in a classroom, or printed in the student diary.

School belonging should be an explicit school value. Gray et al. (2018) recommend that schools develop *teams* to review existing policies and practices within a school to ensure that all methods within a school facilitate belonging for students and do not unintentionally ostracise or exclude specific individuals or groups.

[To adapt and use this policy, delete or modify the text as indicated]

> *In this box, list any specific instructions as to how this policy (or set of guidelines) could be used in your school.*

[INSERT Name of School] Student Belonging Policy

RATIONALE

School belonging—or a sense of psychological membership at school—represents the extent to which students feel accepted, respected, included, and supported in their school environment (Goodenow, 1993). When students have a sense of school belonging they feel confident that they *fit in* and feel safe at school (Riley, 2018).

A sense of school belonging is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that is influenced by many factors and variables within a school setting including individual differences (Allen et al., 2018a). Yet it is important to keep in mind that policies can promote or hinder the extent to which all students—regardless of their background, ability status, gender identity, racial identity, or sexual orientation—have opportunities to belong at school.

School belonging has been found to be an essential component for student wellbeing, academic outcomes, and physical health (Allen et al., 2018a; Arslan, 2018; Arslan et al., 2020) and valued and prioritised in schools (Allen et

al., 2018b). It is estimated that approximately 1 in 3 students does not feel a sense of belonging to school (OECD, 2019). Therefore, to address this issue a student's sense of school belonging should be valued and nurtured within school settings (Allen, 2020a).

In this box, what is your core motivation and need for using a policy or set of guidelines for building belonging.

At our school, belonging is…

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to outline the shared responsibility of belonging for the whole school community inclusive of parents, staff, teachers, students, and school leadership. Every individual within a school community can help create a climate of belonging.

In this box, list any other considerations for your purpose.

SCOPE

This policy includes the role that students, teachers, staff, school leaders and parents play in promoting a sense of belonging for others in the [INSERT name of school] community.

POLICY STATEMENT

School Management

[INSERT name of school] is committed to providing consistent and structured opportunities for students to build positive relationships with each other, their teachers, their parents and staff at our school. Teachers at our school *know* their students and seek feedback from their students about their relationship, rapport and level of engagement. Through school-wide events, assessments and programming, we provide both time and space for teachers to build relationships with their students (Shochet et al., 2011; Waters et al., 2010).

INSERT specific roles and responsibilities of individuals or teams within the school who may be managing a whole school approach to school belonging.

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School leadership (e.g., principals/administrators) create formal structures to consult students on school policy decisions and build their sense of agency. Their voices are represented in policy-making decisions (in the form of a diverse student advisory committee comprised of students from various socioeconomic backgrounds, linguistic backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds, performance levels, and (dis)ability statuses).

Efforts are made at [INSERT name of school] to ensure continuity of care for students during their time at school (Garcia-Reid et al., 2005; Whitlock, 2006).

Our school endeavours to employ teachers who are skilled in content areas and culturally competent and sensitive to students' social and emotional needs (Battistich et al., 1996; Whitlock, 2006).

[INSERT name of school] ensures that teachers have access to professional development that encompasses improving student-teacher relationships and ways to foster positive, safe, and fair classroom environments that build on the strengths and assets that students bring into

the classroom (Allen et al., 2011; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

[INSERT name of school] has strategies in place to evaluate, build or strengthen a teacher's sense of belonging to school (e.g., teacher mentoring programs, induction programs for new staff) (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

[INSERT name of school] implements programs, interventions and/or classroom-based curriculum that teaches social, emotional, and cultural competencies to students (Allen et al., 2017; Frydenberg, 2009; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010).

[INSERT name of school] has a comprehensive and tiered approach to preventing, identifying, and managing mental health concerns (Waters et al., 2010; Wilkinson-Lee et al., 2011; Roche & Kuperminc, 2012).

What are some other things school management/leadership could do?
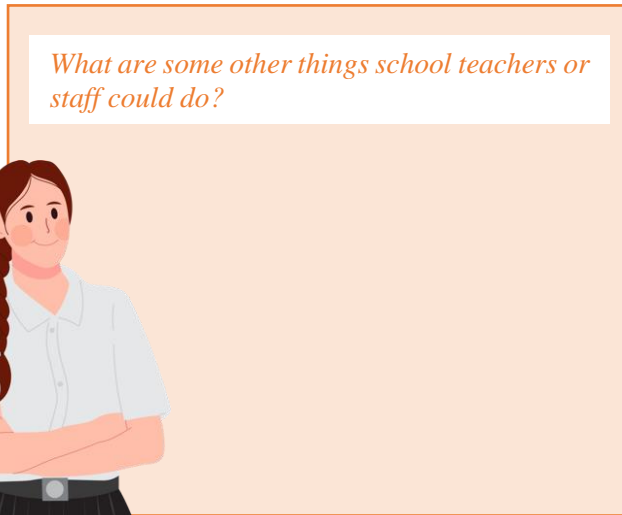
Teachers

Staff at [INSERT name of school] acknowledge that a positive student-teacher relationship is one of the most effective ways to build a student's sense of school belonging (Allen et al., 2018a).

What are some other things school teachers or staff could do?
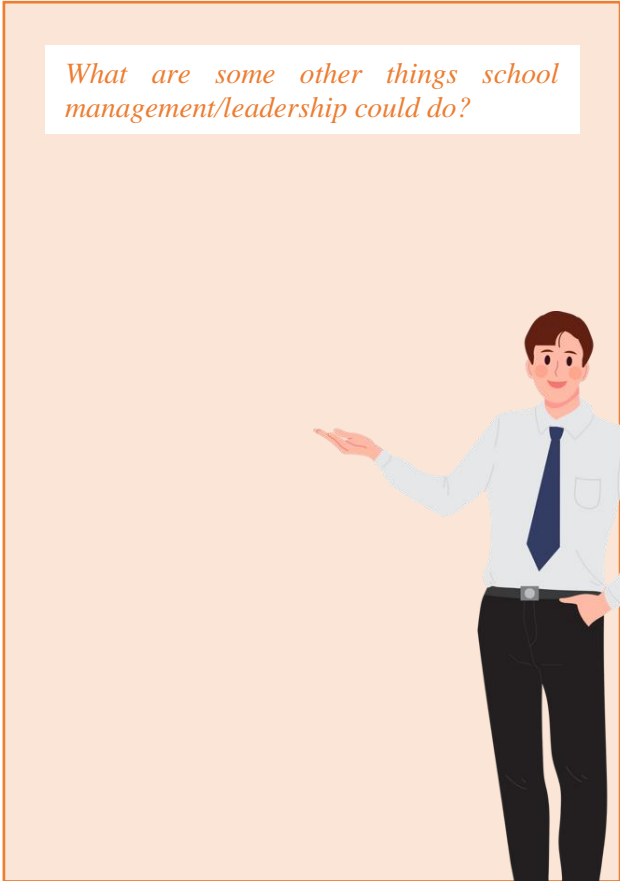
Teachers at [INSERT name of school] are encouraged to provide personal support, affirmation and inspiration for learning, as well as academic support to students (Shochet et al., 2011; Waters et al., 2010).

Teachers at [INSERT name of school] demonstrate fair and consistent restorative justice approaches to issues of school discipline (Sakiz, 2012).

Teachers at [INSERT name of school] provide students with opportunities for personal agency over their learning (Wentzel, 1998; Ryzin et al., 2009).

Teachers actively emphasize the value of what students are learning for uplifting their communities, honouring their ancestral heritage, and combatting issues of social justice and social inequality in school and society.

Teachers are supported by administrators in recognizing and responding to the way larger societal, systemic, and structural inequalities are impacting historically marginalized students in their schools.

Teachers actively build upon the knowledge systems, experiences, and perspectives that students bring as assets into the classroom and school.

Teachers ensure that students understand the importance and purpose of what students are learning (Walker, 2012; Battistich et al., 1996; Whitlock, 2006).

Students

[INSERT name of school] encourages students to support each other academically as well as personally (e.g., peer mentor programs, study clubs, homework group) (Reschly et al., 2008; Ryzin et al., 2009).

[INSERT name of school] has an induction procedure for new students and transition programs at key transition points for students (Ryzin et al., 2009).

All students at [INSERT name of school] are expected to be inclusive, respectful, and affirming toward each other (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Reschly et al., 2008).

Students are encouraged to have high personal expectations and goals around their learning and social wellbeing, with assurance that teachers will support them in reaching these high standards (Heaven et al., 2002; Klem & Connell, 2004; Guthrie & Davis, 2003; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2006).

At [INSERT name of school] all students are encouraged to use their personal strengths. (Proctor et al., 2011) and are made aware that they all have a role to play in contributing to a culture of belonging at their school (Allen, 2020b).

What are some other things school students could do?

Parents

Parents of [INSERT name of school] are encouraged to be involved in school life in meaningful ways (Reschly et al., 2008).

What are some other things parents could do?

[INSERT name of school] provides multiple communication channels for parents that consider their needs and preferences (Reschly et al., 2008).

The school seeks feedback from parents about their overall satisfaction with the [INSERT name of school] and communication from teachers and school leaders more generally. (Reschly et al., 2008).

[INSERT name of school] aims to make parents feel welcomed when they are at school.

Educational opportunities for parents that enhance their connectedness and belonging with the school and their children are available throughout the year (Kelly et al., 2012; Stoddard et al., 2011; Waters et al., 2010).

AUTHORSHIP

The original policy provided can be found in:
Allen, K. A., Gray, D. L., Arslan, G., Riley, K., Vella-Brodrick, D., & Waters, L. (2021). School belonging policy. In K. A. Allen, A. Reupert, & L. Oades (Eds.), *Building better schools with evidence-based policy: Adaptable policy guidelines for teachers and school leaders* (1st ed., pp. 139-146). Routledge. ISBN: 9780367458898, eISBN: 9781003025955

The policy and the book is free to download from the Taylor and Francis website:
https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/oa-edit/10.4324/9781003025955/building-better-schools-evidence-based-policy-kelly-ann-allen-andrea-reupert-lindsay-oades

[INSERT RELEVANT STAFF MEMBERS]. Who is going to author your policy?
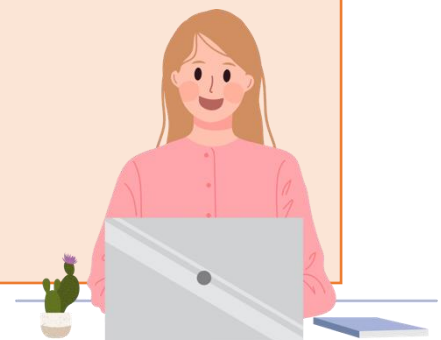
RELATED POLICY AND DOCUMENTS

[INSERT RELEVANT POLICY AND DOCUMENTS]

Date of Ratification
This policy was ratified on the [INSERT DATE]

Date of Review
This policy will be reviewed by [INSERT DATE]

[INSERT RELEVANT POLICY AND DOCUMENTS e.g., Inclusion Policy, Wellbeing Policy, Safety Policy, Counselling policy, Anti-Bullying and Discrimination Policy, Staff Belonging Policy]

FUTURE PLANNING

	OBSTACLES	PROPOSED SOLUTIONS
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

SCHOOL BELONGING ACTION PLAN				
Aim	Process	Who's Involved?	Time Frame	How Will Monitoring or Follow-Up Occur?

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Evaluation Measures

PSYCHOLOGICAL SENSE OF SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP SCALE

OVERVIEW

- This scale measures youth perceptions of sense of school belonging in research investigating associations between the relational quality of educational contexts and motivational and achievement outcomes

SUBSCALES

- None
- Sample items:
    - Other students in this school take my opinions seriously
    - I can really be myself at school
    - I feel proud of belonging to (name of school)

THEME(S)

- Social Support
- Education

TARGET POPULATION

- Youth from 10 years of age and older

LENGTH & HOW IT IS MEASURED

- 18 items
- Scale ranges from 1 (Not at all true) to 5 (Completely true)
- Negatively worded items need to be reverse-coded
- The scores are summed to attain a total score
- Self-report, paper-pencil version
- Available in: English, Spanish

DEVELOPER

- Goodenow, C., 1993

GOOD TO KNOW

- Permission must be attained by the author before using this scale
- The scale is endorsed by the Centers for Disease Control for use in evaluating violence prevention programs

PSYCHOMETRICS

RELIABILITY
- High reliability (internal consistency α = .77-.88)

VALIDITY
-Construct validity

Learn more:

- Goodenow C. (1993). The psychological sense of school membership among adolescents: Scale development and educational correlates. Psychology in the Schools, 30(1), 79-90. doi:10.1002/1520-6807

PSYCHOLOGICAL SENSE OF SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP SCALE

Circle the answer for each statement that is most true for you.

	Not at all true				Completely true
1) I feel like a part of my school.	Not at all true 1	2	3	4	Completely true 5
2) People at my school notice when I am good at something.	Not at all true 1	2	3	4	Completely true 5
3) It is hard for people like me to be accepted at my school.	Not at all true 1	2	3	4	Completely true 5
4) Other students in my school take my opinions seriously.	Not at all true 1	2	3	4	Completely true 5
5) Most teachers at my school are interested in me.	Not at all true 1	2	3	4	Completely true 5
6) Sometimes I feel as if I don't belong in my school.	Not at all true 1	2	3	4	Completely true 5
7) There is at least one teacher or adult I can talk to in my school if I have a problem.	Not at all true 1	2	3	4	Completely true 5
8) People at my school are friendly to me.	Not at all true 1	2	3	4	Completely true 5
9) Teachers here are not interested in people like me.	Not at all true 1	2	3	4	Completely true 5
10) I am included in lots of activities at my school.	Not at all true 1	2	3	4	Completely true 5
11) I am treated with as much respect as other students in my school.	Not at all true 1	2	3	4	Completely true 5
12) I feel very different from most other students at my school.	Not at all true 1	2	3	4	Completely true 5
13) I can really be myself at my school.	Not at all true 1	2	3	4	Completely true 5
14) Teachers at my school respect me.	Not at all true 1	2	3	4	Completely true 5
15) People at my school know that I can do good work.	Not at all true 1	2	3	4	Completely true 5
16) I wish I were in a different school.	Not at all true 1	2	3	4	Completely true 5
17) I feel proud to belong to my school.	Not at all true 1	2	3	4	Completely true 5
18) Other students at my school like me the way that I am.	Not at all true 1	2	3	4	Completely true 5

Goodenow, C., 1993

TEACHER BELONGING

How would you measure teacher belonging?

PARENT BELONGING

How would you measure parent belonging?

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RECOMMENDED READING

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Notes....