

HARNESSING RELATIONSHIPS TO IMPROVE SENSE OF BELONGING AND MOTIVATION



SENSE OF BELONGING

the feelings of being socially connected, accepted, and included

I feel accepted by other students at school.

When I am with other students at school, I feel included.

I feel like I belong at school.



INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

(in the context of learning) the drive to learn because of the inherent enjoyment or satisfaction derived from engagement in learning activities

I study because...

- I feel happy and satisfied while learning new things.
- I enjoy it when I have discussions with interesting teachers.
- I really like going to school.
- My studies allow me to continually learn about many things that interest me.



WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

A strong sense of belonging and motivation are key for **healthy school functioning**.

Research shows that students who feel they belong and are motivated tend to **perform better, enjoy learning, and have higher well-being, confidence, and attendance**.

They are also less likely to experience bullying or depressive symptoms.

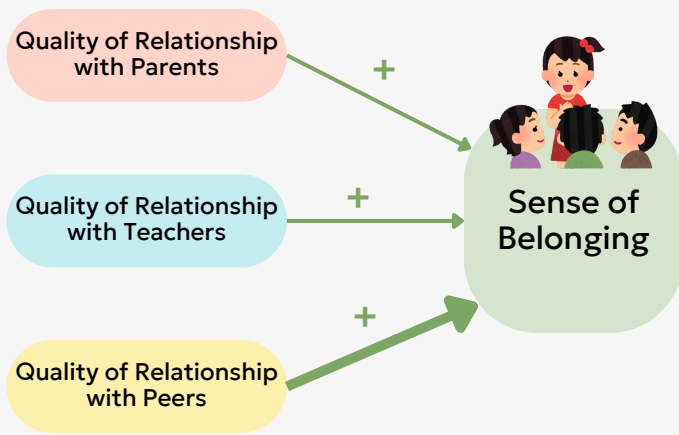


HOW IMPORTANT ARE RELATIONSHIPS IN PROMOTING SENSE OF BELONGING AND MOTIVATION?

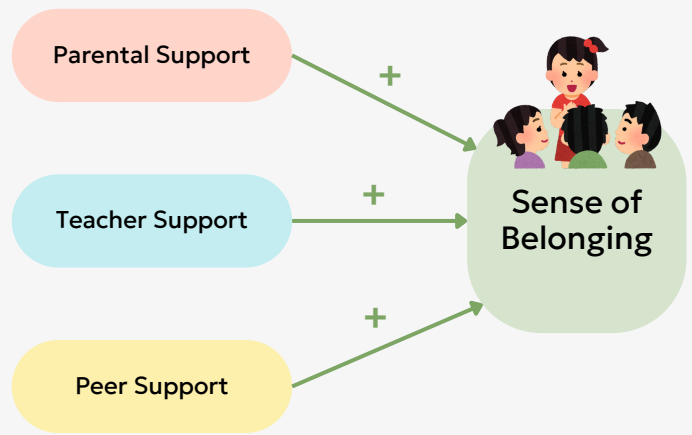
Survey of over 3000 Secondary 1 students

Relationships are important for adolescents to feel connected in school

Higher quality relationships with parents, teachers, and peers are linked to students feeling a **greater sense of belonging**.

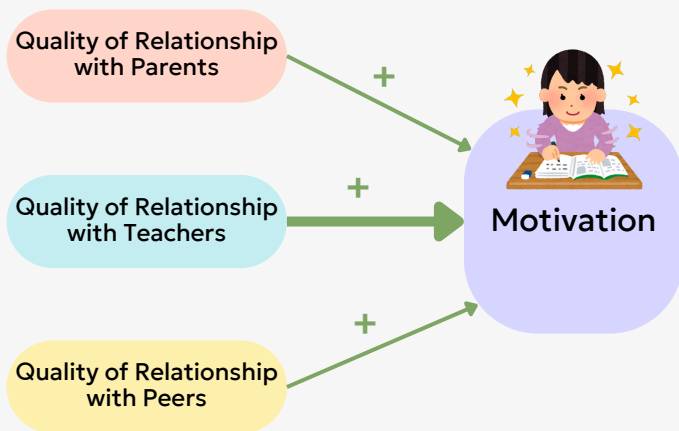


Feeling supported by parents, teachers, and peers is linked to a **greater sense of belonging**.

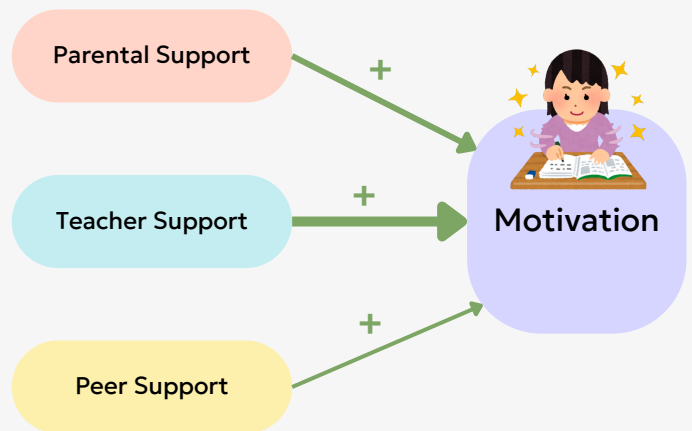


Relationships are important for adolescents' motivation to study

Higher quality relationships with parents, teachers, and peers are linked to students feeling **more motivated to study**.



Feeling supported by parents, teachers, and peers is linked to a **greater motivation to study**.



Note: PSLE scores were taken into account by including them as a control variable in the analyses;
+ = positive association; arrows heads suggest direction of influence; thicker arrows suggest stronger influence

KEY CONCERN

A study with 763 Secondary 2 and 3 students found that **adolescents tend to use individual strategies to handle school challenges and stress**, with boys being especially unlikely to seek help from others.

This suggests that **many students may not fully use their social relationships to enhance their sense of belonging, motivation, and school success.**

When I am stressed, I engage in activities that help me relax or feel better, try to solve the problem myself, and resolve my problems in ways that attract the least attention to me.

I also keep my emotions to myself and do not show them.



Source: Caleon, I. S., Tan, C. S., Jocson, R., Kadir, M., Chua, J., Zhou, J. L., & Ilham, N. Q. (2023). Rethinking Stress: The Influence of Stress Mindset on Wellbeing, Resilience and School Outcomes of Adolescents. Project Closure Report. National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University.

WHAT SHOULD PARENTS & TEACHERS DO?

Help Students Recognize and Value Relationships



Highlight the benefits of positive relationships, such as better mental health, happiness, and resilience.



Share personal stories or create activities that show the importance of friendships, family, and teamwork.



Encourage students to reflect on how their relationships have positively impacted their school experience.



Promote gratitude by having students express appreciation (e.g., writing thank-you notes) to strengthen relationships and build support networks.

Guide Students to Harness Their Relationships Effectively



Normalise asking for and receiving help by sharing your own experiences and reassuring students that it's a strength, not a weakness.



Teach students that seeking support from trusted adults or peers is a positive step and can also benefit those offering help.



Build trust by listening, showing interest, and keeping students' concerns confidential unless they consent to sharing.



Help students manage rejection by teaching them to consider alternative reasons for it and not let negative experiences discourage future help-seeking.