

## Resource Guide: Creating a Culture of Belonging and Safety

*"We are biologically, cognitively, physically and spiritually wired to love, be loved and to belong."*

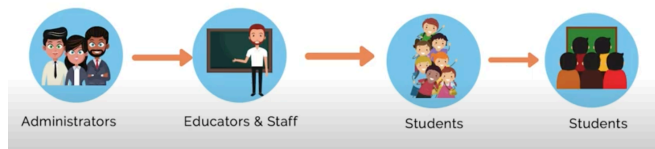
~ Brene Brown



Researchers define **belonging** as “the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school environment.” In other words, students—and teachers—feel seen and accepted in their full humanity.

Another group of researchers suggest that fostering a sense of **belonging** is not just up to the teachers, but that the students are partners or even leaders in creating a school climate in which everyone belongs.

It's a domino effect...

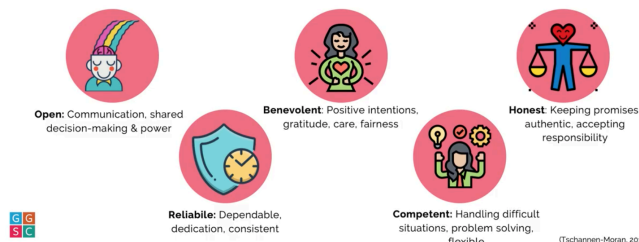


### Psychological Safety

Definition (classroom): Psychological safety exists when children can express themselves - all their ideas, questions, concerns and mistakes - without the fear of judgment, humiliation or punishment. In the school setting, this includes being able to ask any question pertaining to students but extends beyond the academic.

### Trust

ONE PERSON'S WILLINGNESS TO BE VULNERABLE TO ANOTHER IS BASED ON THE CONFIDENCE THAT THE LATTER PERSON IS...



*"It is difficult to feel a sense of belonging when one feels psychologically unsafe"*

~ Amy Edmondson

## Elementary: Beginning of the Year

### Activities

- [Kindness Buddy](#): Students get a secret kindness buddy to do a kind act for during the week. At the end of the week, they reveal their buddies and reflect on how it felt to be kind.
- 2x10: Spend 2 minutes a day for 10 days getting to know a student with whom you want to foster a positive relationship.
- Superstar: [Build Community through Ice Breaker Games](#) (Playworks)
- [Games for Social and Emotional Learning](#) (Playworks)
- [Belonging Chal Talk \(gr 3 -12\)](#)

### Articles

- [Ideas for Fostering a Sense of Belonging For the Students In Your Classroom](#): KnowledgeWorks
- [6 Things Teachers Can Do to Build Relationships with Students](#)

## Secondary: Beginning of the Year

### Activities

- Discuss with your students:
  - *What does “belonging” feel like or look like?*
  - *What do others do or say that makes you feel like you belong?*
  - *What can you do for others to help them feel like they belong?*
- Foster connections by helping students find common ground
  - *Characterize your classroom as a learning community and invite ‘members or citizens’ to create community norms*
  - *Deepen your understanding of your student’s current mindset and what can motivate them.*
- [Promote a Sense of Belonging in High School Math](#) (Edutopia)
- [Be the Change: Perform Random Acts of Kindness](#)
- [Belonging Chal Talk \(gr 3 -12\)](#)
- [I Wish My Teacher Knew](#)

### Videos

- [Encouraging Prosocial Actions in Students](#): *Students watch videos on prosocial (kind, helpful) action, complete self-reflection activities, and plan and record their prosocial acts over ten consecutive days. They finish with a reflection on the impact of their actions. This resource meets the needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence and is appropriate for middle and high school.*

### Articles

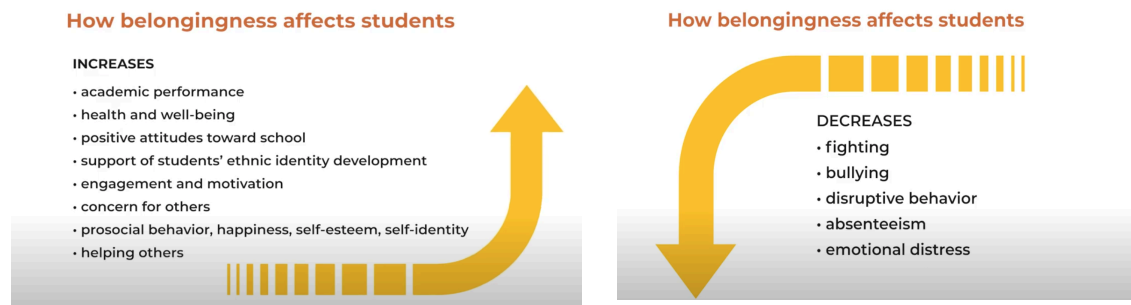
- [The Questions of Belonging: Youth Experience](#) (Greater Good in Education)
- [4 Ways to Foster Positive Relationships](#) (Greater Good Science Center)
- [6 Things Teachers Can Do to Build Relationships with Students](#)

# Leader Resources

## Connecting with the theme of Belonging

- Ask staff members to “Think of a time when you were part of a learning community where you didn’t feel like you belonged. How did that affect you physically, mentally, emotionally?”
- Triad Share/Whole Group Share out
- Closure: What are some take-aways?

Belonging is a basic human need that, according to some [scientists](#), has more of an impact on students than things like growth mindset, grit, and self-control.



## Creating a Safe Learning Environment: The Science of Belonging

- Watch the video: [The Science of Belonging](#)  
Select a few questions for discussion:
  - What were the two researchers’ definitions of “belonging” provided in the video?
  - What did you agree with in the two definitions? What is missing?
  - Thinking of a time when you felt like you belonged in a learning environment—when both your peers and your teacher(s) accepted you, cared about who you were as a person, and you felt safe to speak up, take risks, and fail – what did it feel like? What did your teacher(s) and peers do or say to make you feel like you belonged?
  - Now, thinking of a time when you didn’t feel like you belonged, what did it feel like physically? What did it feel like emotionally?
  - *What do you act and feel like when you’re in an environment where you feel you belong?*
- Discuss as a staff:
  - What policies and structures does our school have in place that might limit student belonging? For example, do we have policies about dress, hair, or cultural practices that target certain groups?
- Watch and discuss: [Building a Belonging Classroom](#) (Edutopia)
- Read and discuss: [How to Cultivate a Sense of Belonging in Schools](#) (Edutopia)
- Read and discuss: [What We Know About Belonging From Scientific Research](#). Mindset Scholars summarizes some of the research on belonging in schools, especially among middle, high school, and college students coming from marginalized backgrounds. It also includes several research-tested interventions that schools can use, such as having new students read essays written by senior students about how they overcame their fears about belonging.
- [Belonging For Educators](#): This free 45-minute online course from Stanford University’s Project for Education Research that Scales (PERTS), educators learn about belonging, why it’s important, and belonging strategies for their classrooms.

## Cultivating Belonging through the Teacher-Student Relationship

- Reflect and discuss:
  - Think of a teacher or mentor with whom you really connected and/or made a significant difference in your life. What was it that made this person special? Was it what they said, or didn't say? Did they have certain qualities or did they act in an extraordinary way? Or something else?
- Reflect and discuss:
  - What are ways you foster positive relationships with students?
  - How do you support students in their development of healthy identities?
  - What supports are in place at our school that help students and teachers cultivate positive relationships with each other?
  - In what ways could we improve in any of these areas?
- Watch and discuss: [Cultivating Belonging through the Teacher-Student and Peer Relationships](#)
- [How School Leaders Can Boost Students' Sense of Belonging](#) (Edutopia)

## Cultivating Belonging through Peer Relationships

- Reflect and discuss:
  - *How does our school encourage positive relationships among students?*
  - *How does our school encourage cross-group friendships?*
  - *What opportunities do students have to take the lead in building relationships with other students?*
  - *In what ways could we improve in any of these areas?*
- Watch and discuss: [The Importance of Peer Relationships](#)

## Using the Science of Trust to Build a Belonging Culture

- Reflect and discuss:
  - Think of a work experience in which there was a high level of trust among you and your colleagues. What did that feel and look like? How was trust fostered? Consider the elements of trust (i.e., openness, benevolence, honesty, reliability, competence). How were these put into practice among you and your colleagues?
  - How does our school foster trust among staff and students? What is one thing that could help increase the levels of trust, especially with diverse groups?
- Watch and discuss: [Using the Science of Trust to Build a Belonging Culture](#)
- Staff Meeting Rituals that Build Trust and Community:
  - At the beginning of a meeting: Choose an open-ended question, such as "What is recent learning?", or "What kindness has a colleague or parent shown you recently?" or "if your feelings were a type of weather, what would that be for you today? Why?"
  - At the end of a meeting: Have group members reflect on a question and then name something that helps them leave on an optimistic note, such as celebrating a student's success or acknowledging the good work of a staff member or highlighting the progress being made on a challenging issue.
  - Examples of reflective questions:
    - "What are my next steps?"
    - "What's the next conversation I'm going to have about this and with whom?"
    - "Who do I want to connect with about this topic?"
    - "A word or phrase that reflects how I feel about moving forward with this..."

- Offer an appreciation for someone in the room.
- “I’m eager to learn more about...”
- [3 Signature SEL Practices Playbook](#) (CASEL)

## Parent/Family Resources

- Cultivating Belonging through family rituals
  - At the dinner table, go around, each person sharing to these prompts:
    - 3 things that made you smile
    - 2 new things you learned today
    - 1 thing that surprised you
- Share with parents/caregivers powerful phrases from school that they can use at home to promote mindset of belonging and psychological trust
- Invite parents to learn from their child at a student led conference, where they might meet and learn from other students and their families. Families, no matter the structure or make-up, need to feel like they belong too.

## Quotes

- I’ve come to a frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It’s my personal approach that creates the climate. It’s my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child’s life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or dehumanized. ~ **Haim Ginott**
- Those who have a strong sense of love and belonging have the courage to be imperfect. ~**Brené Brown**
- I long; as does every human being; to be at home wherever I find myself. ~ **Maya Angelou**
- I like you just the way you are ~ **Mister Rogers**
- Within each of us there is an intense feeling to belong. This feeling of unity and togetherness comes from the warmth of a smile, a handshake or a hug, through laughter and unspoken demonstrations of love. It comes in the quiet, reverent moments of soft conversations and of listening. ~ **William R. Bradford**

