Sense of Belonging – Impact on Resilience

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Every person possesses the fundamental need to belong. ¹

Adult-Child Relationship

The resiliency literature shows that, outside the family circle, teachers were the most frequently cited positive role models named by children. Young people reported that these teachers took a compassionate view, trusted and accepted children unconditionally, and looked beyond behaviour, seeking to understand the underlying causes.¹, ²

In addition, young people reported that the teachers made them feel as if they mattered. They demonstrated a belief in the child’s capacity for success, showed genuine interest in the child’s activities and pursuits, listened attentively to the child’s feelings, hopes and dreams, let them know they were missed when they were absent, and found ways to include the child in classroom and after school activities.³ “This relationship provided an environment of reinforcement, good modelling and constructive feedback for physical, intellectual, psychological and social growth. The attentive, caring and wise voice of a supportive adult gets internalized and becomes part of the child’s own voice.” ⁴ If a child is banished from the group (suspended or expelled), the opportunity for such learning is greatly diminished. Research shows that young people derive personal satisfaction and a sense of meaning from these relationships. Young people at greatest risk for dropping out of school have never been friends with any teacher.⁵

Peer Relationships

Finding ways to support peer connection is also crucial. In a study looking at the effects of friendship on kindergarten children’s school adjustment, researchers found that positive peer relationships made a difference. Children with a larger
number of classroom friends at the beginning of the year showed more positive perceptions about school by the second month, and those who were able to keep these friendships liked school better as the year progressed. In addition, those who made new friends also made gains in their school performance. Children who were outside the social circle saw school in a less favourable light, were absent more often and had lower performance levels over the year. 6

Participation
A sense of belonging helps children feel like they have something to offer, that they can contribute and be a “part of the group.” This gives their lives meaning and increases their motivation to engage in mastery opportunities, develop social problem-solving skills, and be part of group decision making, all of which help them develop autonomy and self control. 3

References


