YDi

Social Well-being

What the YDI Measures

- Friendship Intimacy
- Peer Belonging
- Loneliness
- Supportive Adults at Home
- Supportive Adults in the Community
- Community Belonging

Social well-being assesses the quality of meaningful relationships youth have with their peers, family, and different community members. Positive and healthy social relationships play an important role in promoting physical, mental, and emotional health during and beyond youth (Mahoney et al., 2020). Forming and maintaining social relationships is paramount to motivation and well-being (Michalski et al., 2020).

On the YDI 2022, 82% of participants reported having at least one close friend. Conversely, only 46% of youth reported they felt a sense of belonging among peers. 20% reported high levels of loneliness, which was consistent with YDI 2021 findings. Female, gender diverse, and 2SLGBTQ+ identifying students were significantly more likely to report high levels of loneliness and low levels of peer belonging. 77 % of youth reported having a supportive adult at home, although 2SLGBTQ+ youth were significantly less likely to report having supportive adults at home compared to other youth.

Peer belonging refers to students' sense of fitting in and feeling included, accepted, and **supported** by their peers. Peer belonging contributes to more positive emotions and well-being, as well as greater intrinsic motivation and success at school (Allen et al., 2022). Peer belonging is particularly important for students who feel marginalized or underrepresented. For example, studies have shown that feeling a sense of belonging protects against depression and suicidal ideation among 2SLGBTQ+ young people (Madireddy & Madireddy, 2022).

Action Ideas:
- Consider peer-education opportunities, where students can teach each other about well-being, health, or other topics of common interest. Encourage students to take the lead in choosing and designing content areas they are curious about.
- Use community-building circles as part of a regular classroom routine (weekly, bi-weekly or monthly). This practice can be implemented and adapted for use at all grade levels, and encourages clear communication and trusting peer relationships within the classroom.
- Foster students' social and emotional competencies, like self-regulation, self-awareness, and social awareness, to improve peer belonging. Consider evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) programs that align with your context and population of students, such as Facing History and Ourselves (Canada) and Lions Quest Skills for Action.

Friendship intimacy - closeness and openness in sharing thoughts and feelings in friendship - is an important hallmark for friendships in adolescence. Friendship intimacy contributes to greater sense of belonging (Petrucci et al., 2022), self-esteem (Webster et al., 2021) and provides an important source of emotional support (Manchanda et al., 2023).

Action Ideas:
Personal identity and intimacy in friendships are strongly related and influence each other (Branje et al., 2021). Fostering all students' sense of identity and respect for each other may contribute to their ability to create close friendship bonds (Branje et al., 2021). Begin with practices to understand your sense of self-identity and then try sharing these strategies with your students to celebrate and build awareness around the identities in your classrooms.

- Review your sense of self-identity and shared connection with others by completing a shared identity practice, to encourage generosity and find commonalities with others.
- Explore the qualities of 'identity-safe' classrooms (Goyer et al., 2019; Lowe, 2020), such as actively affirming all types of identities, modelling vulnerability, and supporting students to share their own identity stories. Discuss these qualities with your colleagues and students to develop common language and understanding of identity (Safir, 2016).
- Guide students through a lesson plan dedicated to exploring self-identity and understanding identities of others (White, 2019).

Adolescents' **sense of community belonging**, whether in their neighbourhood, cultural community, or other areas, is associated with life satisfaction (Helliwell et al., 2019; Lloyd et al., 2021) and can be an important protective factor for youth when experiencing stressful life events (Kingsbury et al., 2020).

Action Ideas:
- Provide opportunities for community engagement within schools to support accessibility and inclusive partnerships, as can be found in a community-school based model. Partnering with external community organizations to offer extracurricular activities or services in a range of content areas within the school setting may minimize geographic barriers for participation, while promoting community-based connections with adults and peers.
- Integrate community-based service projects into the classroom, enhancing the range of community connections available to youth. Service learning, as a structured and integrated teaching modality, has been found to support students' sense of civic engagement, social and emotional skills, and academic achievement (Chiva-Bartoll et al., 2020; Gartland, 2021).

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Website Resources

CASEL Guide to Community Building Circles: https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/community-building-circles/

CASEL Guide to SEL Programs: https://pg.casel.org/review-programs/

Facing History and Ourselves (Canada): https://www.facinghistory.org/about/locations/facing-history-ourselves-canada

Lions Quest Skills for Action: https://www.lions-quest.org/explore-our-sel-curriculum/high-school-social-and-emotional-learning-program/

Greater Good in Action - Shared Identity practice: https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/shared_identity

Edutopia - Five-step exercise on identity and belonging: https://www.edutopia.org/article/creating-learning-environment-where-all-kids-feel-valued