

Connectedness & Belonging in the Workplace

One of the primary pillars of mental wellness is belonging. When we feel as though we belong in a social context, in our families, communities and places of employment, we tend to thrive and feel more connected to those around us. However, according to the Harvard Business Review, 40% of people say they feel isolated at work. Feelings of isolation are closely tied to poorer mental health, wellbeing, and job satisfaction. Fostering connectedness and belonging in the workplace can improve employee morale, satisfaction, and mental wellbeing. In a school environment in particular, the mental wellbeing of staff is crucial to ensuring that students are receiving the best education and support possible.

What can you do?

To facilitate more connectedness and belonging in a school environment, here are some suggestions that both employees and employers can implement:

1. Find common interests and build groups around them

One way to encourage connectedness and belonging is to find shared interests with your fellow colleagues. You can do this by encouraging the creation of groups and social clubs within the school environment that align with the shared interests of your coworkers. Your students have social clubs to encourage connection, why can't you?

2. Use cause for celebration as opportunity for connection

Is it someone's birthday? A cultural event or holiday? A fun social event, such as a sports match or the release of a film? Find cause for celebration and mark these occasions with small themed parties and gatherings in the staff room!



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3. Develop trusting relationships amongst staff

Meaningful connections are built over time, they don't simply happen. Finding ways to foster deeper relationships built on mutual support and understanding can encourage belonging and connectedness. Ways of doing this include: having formal or informal mentorship programs, creating a peer support group within your school environment, creating accessible and dedicated spaces for school staff to communicate openly with one another, developing clear policies around workplace harassment and bullying so staff feel safe and respected.

4. Engage in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion professional development as a staff

Undeniably, a large part of what makes people feel as though they belong is knowing their identity is acknowledged and respected. Without meaningful inclusion of all staff, there cannot be true belonging. Participating in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training as professional development can help ensure that staff members are fostering inclusion in meaningful ways.

5. Talk about it!

Start the conversation with staff about ways that connectedness and belonging can be nurtured more effectively in your school environment. Having an open dialogue can provide insights into what is working well and the areas where people might feel isolated or disconnected. Encourage creative ideas and suggestions about how to make the school environment a more inclusive and connected place for all.

Good mental health is inextricably linked to feelings of belonging, connectedness, and community. Given how much time we spend in our workplace environments, they are an ideal place to foster meaningful bonds and connections. Reducing isolation in the workplace can improve job satisfaction and the wellbeing of staff. Try these tips to support connectedness and belonging in your school environment.

