

What is the importance of social connection in schools?

The proportion of young adults experiencing loneliness and isolation has increased every year between 1976 and 2019. Today, young people have among the highest rates of loneliness.¹ Research finds that experiencing loneliness and social isolation in childhood not only negatively affects health and academic outcomes in youth, but is also associated with worsened health and economic outcomes in adulthood.^{2,3,4,5,6}

Our connectedness is influenced by more than personal or interpersonal factors. It is also shaped by the social infrastructure of the communities in which we are born, grow up, learn, play, work, and age. Thus, our schools and neighborhoods play a key role in either facilitating or hindering social connection,^{7,8} especially among our youth.

What can schools and educators do to increase social connection in schools?

1. **Develop and prioritize a strategic plan for school connectedness.** Include evidence-based practices such as peer-led programs and partnerships with key community groups.
2. **Build social connection into health curricula.** Include up-to-date, age-appropriate information on the consequences of social connection on health, key risk and protective factors, and strategies for increasing social connection.
3. **Implement socially based educational techniques.** For example, cooperative learning projects can improve educational outcomes as well as peer relations.⁹
4. **Create a supportive school environment that fosters belonging.** This can be through practices that allow students to lean on one another and learn from each other's experiences. These might include equitable classroom management, mentoring, and peer support groups.

For more information and resources on the harms of social isolation and loneliness, and ways to increase your level of social connection, read the advisory at: surgeongeneral.gov/connection



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1. [Buecker et al., 2021.](#)
 2. [Cené et al., 2022.](#)
 3. [Caspi et al., 2006.](#)
 4. [Danese et al., 2009.](#)
 5. [Loades et al., 2020.](#)
 6. [Ballard et al., 2019.](#)
 7. [National Academies of Sciences Engineering and Medicine, 2020.](#)
 8. [Holt-Lunstad, 2022.](#)
 9. [Roseth et al., 2008.](#)

