Cheltenham Communities That Care

BELONGINGNESS IN SCHOOL & COMMUNITY

As adults, we value being accepted for who we are, being part of a group, and being appreciated for our time and efforts. This makes us feel like we belong, and we want our kids to feel the same!

School is one of the most important places where youth need to feel like they belong. If they don't find trustworthy friends, supportive teachers/coaches, and/or engaging activities, youth could feel isolated, lonely, and detached, which could impact their overall mental health. However, feeling engaged can boost youth self-confidence, attitude, academic performance, connection to others, and sense of school belongingness.

What is School Belongingness?

The widely-accepted definition of school belongingness is "the extent to which children feel individually welcomed, respected, included, and supported by others within the school environment" (Carol Goodenow and Kathleen Grady, 1993).

What Can Youth Do to Develop a Sense of School and Community Belongingness?

- **Participate in school activities.** This is a great way to meet other students, develop friendships, and find meaning through involvement and contributions.
- **Become integrated in the community through local clubs, activities, and events.** Developing relationships outside of school can not only be fulfilling, but can also provide another set of friends to turn to for advice and support, especially when disagreements occur at school.
- **Get to know teachers and coaches** in order to establish connections and feel comfortable asking questions, seeking advice or guidance, and engaging in conversation.
- **Help with event set-ups, decorations, and clean-ups.** This is a good way to interact with peers as well as give back to school and community.
- **Join a focus group or forum.** Learn what's going on by engaging with others and contributing to the larger conversation.

This newsletter is produced by Cheltenham Communities That Care (CTC). For more information, contact Wendy Rosenfeld, Community Mobilizer, at wrosenfeld@fsmontco.org. Visit our website and connect with us on Facebook.

What Can Parents and Caregivers Do to Develop a Sense of School and Community Belongingness?

- **Establish a positive level of communication.** Become familiar with school handbooks, email messages, social media posts, and school events.
- **Get involved in school committees and activities such as PTO, Back-to-School Night, prom, sports, and special events.** These provide great opportunities to meet and talk with other parents/caregivers and school staff.
- **Check in with teachers from time to time.** Let them know you are interested in your child's progress, both the problems and the successes.
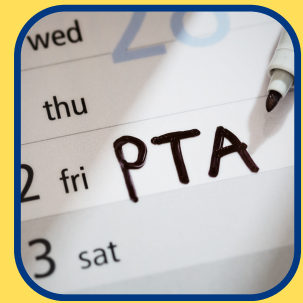
Cheltenham Schools have invited Cheltenham Communities That Care (CTC) to become a partner in their efforts to create an atmosphere of belonging for students and parents/caregivers! We plan to do that by:

- Facilitating the **Cheltenham CTC Youth Group**, one of the many diverse clubs offered at Cheltenham High School. The Youth Group helps give students a voice by inviting them to assist in planning activities about substance use prevention and positive mental health.
- Continuing to hold the **Cheltenham CTC Student Volunteer Opportunities Fair**, which connects high school students with meaningful volunteer activities offered by local organizations.
- Offering the **Healthy Relationships** program, provided by Laurel House, which teaches high school and middle school students how to distinguish healthy relationships from unhealthy ones and how to respond appropriately.
- Partnering with Access Services to create a **student forum for athletes** who have encountered acts of prejudice at sporting events. This will include several sessions on how to cope with, report, and respond to prejudice in a respectful and productive manner.
- **Informing juniors and seniors of the dangers and risks associated with drugs and alcohol** prior to prom and graduation, so they can make smart and healthy choices.
- **Attending Back-to-School Nights and other school events** to share resources and materials concerning substance use prevention and positive mental health.
- Partnering with the schools and PTO groups to **provide needed services and programs that benefit youth, families, and school staff**.

Strong community involvement allows us all to combine our efforts, promote collaboration and friendship, instill equity and diversity, and foster a sense of trust, respect, caring, and belongingness in our community. We encourage you to join our efforts! All are welcome!

RESOURCES

THE SCIENCE OF SCHOOL BELONGING
HTTPS://WWW.PSYCHOLOGYTODAY.COM/US/BLOG/SENSE-BELONGING/202201/THE-SCIENCE-SCHOOL-BELONGING

A DEEP DIVE INTO THE BENEFITS OF SCHOOL BELONGING
HTTPS://WWW.PSYCHOLOGYTODAY.COM/US/BLOG/SENSE-BELONGING/202202/DEEP-DIVE-THE-BENEFITS-SCHOOL-BELONGING

SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS HELPS STUDENTS THRIVE
https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/school_connectedness.htm

CHELTENHAM COMMUNITIES THAT CARE
www.cheltenhamcommunitiesthatcare.org