



FEELING CONNECTED FOR STUDENTS

"Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality."

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

OVERVIEW

Students write about a time when they felt connected to someone and consider why they experienced that sense of closeness.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Any time during the year, but especially at the beginning of the school year to cultivate a sense of belonging at school
- When students are feeling stressed and overwhelmed

TIME REQUIRED

- 10 minutes

LEVEL

- Middle School
- High School
- College

MATERIALS

- A pen or pencil for writing (or a computer)

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Remember a time when they felt a strong connection with someone, write about what happened, and consider what made them feel close to that person

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making a Practice Trauma-Informed](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Take a moment to think of a time when you felt connected to someone. What happened and how did it make you feel?

INSTRUCTIONS

- Begin by asking students:
 - *Why do you think it's important for humans to feel connected to each other? What makes you feel connected to another person? What makes you feel a sense of connection here at school?*
- Explain that research has found that one way to foster a sense of connection is to recall a time when you felt a deep sense of connection to another person. Today, they're going to try it.
- Invite students to close their eyes or look at a spot on the floor in front of them, and take a few deep breaths to calm themselves. Keeping their eyes closed or down, tell them:
 - *Try to think of a time when you felt a strong bond with someone. Choose a specific example of an experience you had with this person where you felt a strong sense of connection to them.*
 - *This could be a time you had a meaningful conversation, gave or received support, experienced a great loss or success together, or witnessed an historic moment together.*

- *Once you've thought of a specific example, spend a few minutes writing about what happened. In particular, consider the ways in which this experience made you feel close to the other person.*

CLOSURE

- Invite students to share in pairs, groups, or as a whole class what this activity was like for them. How did it make them feel? Do they feel a stronger sense of connection or concern for each other, their friends, or their family? Why or why not?

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

Do students feel a stronger sense of connection to each other or to the school as a result of this practice? Do they feel a greater sense of well-being?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

In a [study](#), some participants reflected on a time when they felt a strong bond with someone else; other participants wrote about a time when they felt especially competent or autonomous. Compared with those in the other groups, the participants who reflected on their experience of closeness reported greater feelings of connectedness and concern for others.

What's more, they also reported a stronger intention to carry out a variety of altruistic behaviors over the next six weeks, including giving money to charity and going out of their way to help a stranger in need.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

When students feel a [sense of connectedness](#) at school, a fundamental psychological need of theirs is being met. Indeed, a feeling of connection to teachers and students can foster a greater sense of emotional well-being, leading to increased engagement with others and [academic achievement](#). And when students feel connected and cared about, they are better able to expend energy on helping and caring for others, which in turn, fosters a sense of belongingness for everyone at school.