

2 MIN READ

Can Teenagers Feel a Sense of Belonging at School?



May 11, 2023 11:48:06 AM

K-12 Education Tips and Tools Municipalities Higher Ed Families

We asked Sara Gomez, a 17-year-old senior from one of our partnering schools to share her perspective on whether schools can create a sense of belonging in students. Here is her (totally honest!) answer:

I'm not sure that high schools can make all students feel like they belong. There are always kids who are outcasts; some of them have friend groups, and some don't. These kids can get teased, harassed, or bullied — and usually when teachers can't see it, like in hallways during passing periods, at lunch, and on the bus. It's happened to me, and I've seen it happen to other people.

As teenagers we want to experiment and express ourselves in the way we do our hair, the clothes we wear, how we act, and what we like to talk about. A lot of us get picked on for just trying to find out who we are.

It's not that teachers don't care about kids getting pushed around and put down, but some of them seem too busy. Sometimes it seems like they're focused on the popular kids. Schools do anti-bullying talks, and the words are great. But the truth is that it's hard to put the words into action when bullying is invisible to teachers. And some kids are just mean, and no presentation will change that.

In my experience, school counselors are good advocates and can help you when you don't feel comfortable and safe at school. For example, when we went back to in-person school after the Covid shutdown, I felt anxious around big groups of people. And I was trying to handle it on my own. My friends would try to help, but there's only so much another student can do. Plus I know that trying to fix other people's problems can be overwhelming. So I went to the counselor, and she listened and gave me things to try that actually helped, like breathing exercises and apps to help me calm myself. She also suggested finding a teacher when I got overwhelmed and just chilling out in their empty classroom.

The counselor also created a small place for me to belong. She got a group of us together once a week to relax, be ourselves, and just talk. I was friendly with everyone in the group. But I switched schools for my junior year, so figuring out how to belong was hard again.

I transferred to a hybrid school, and while I like that it's smaller and more flexible, it's hard to make connections with other students. The other kids already have their friend groups. Something good did come out of my transfer, though: a teacher at my new school told me about a Youth Advisory Council available to my school. The YAC showed me that a lot of students experience the same feelings that I do. I understand I'm not alone. The YAC is working on ways to promote mental health awareness in schools. One of my favorite ideas is a pretty simple one: little class breaks to talk to each other, draw, or be quiet. I think a chance to step away from work for a few minutes would be good for everyone, including teachers.

So, do some kids feel a sense of belonging in school while others don't? Or do all kids feel like they don't quite belong? I don't know the answer to that. Right now, my sense of belonging feels most real when I'm at home with my big family, my dog, Blue, and my cat, Tofer.

I have no plan to be a high school teacher (since I'm a senior this year, the idea of going back to high school on purpose is crazy to me!). But if I were a teacher, I think I'd see that kid who was lost. I would *listen* to a kid who stayed after class to talk to me about their anxiety. And I'd let them know it's ok.

Sara Gomez

High School Senior

Post Share Like 6 Share

Proactive Leadership: 5 Tactics to Help Safeguard Your School Staff Against Burnout

Care Solace: Jan 26, 2024 3:33:21 PM

As a school leader, you're well acquainted with burnout. It's a potential occupational hazard for educators, no matter what their role. You may have...

K-12 Education Tips and Tools

Read More

Care Solace Wins 2023 Supes' Choice Award for Outstanding SEL Solution

Care Solace: Dec 15, 2023 8:27:13 AM

Cardiff, CA - Care Solace proudly announces its recognition as the 2023 Supes' Choice Award Winner in the SEL Solution of the Year category. This...

Press Release

Read More

New Whitepaper on Gen Z Mental Health Uncovers Critical Data on Youth Suicide

Care Solace: Nov 30, 2023 8:35:01 AM

Cardiff, CA - In an era defined by rapid technological advances and unprecedented digital immersion, the burgeoning mental health challenges of...

Press Release

Read More

Calming the chaos of mental health care

Request a Demo

Become a Verified Provider

Services

K-12 Education

Higher Education

Municipalities

Employers

Families

Company

Our Story

Join Our Team

Newsroom

Get In Touch

Contact Us

Care Solace is not a mental health services provider. For life threatening emergencies, call 911 or the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.