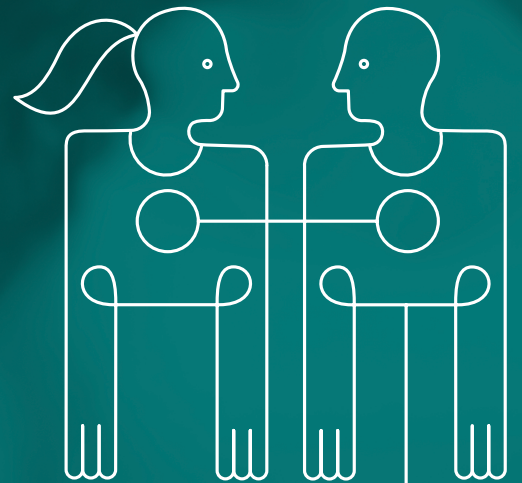
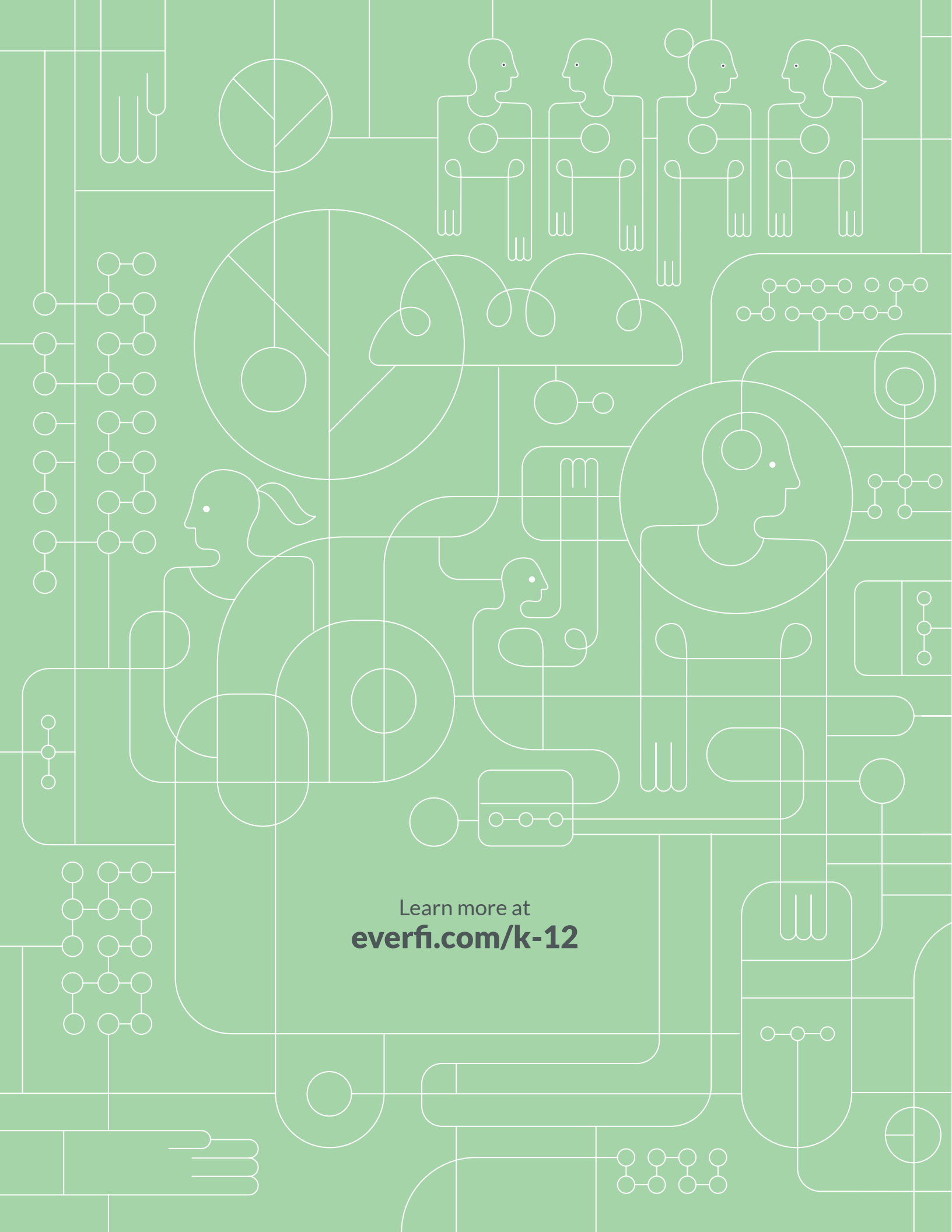


EVERFI

# The Importance of Belonging—

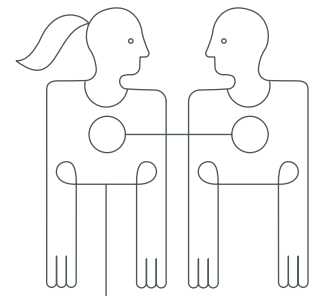
A NATIONWIDE LOOK AT ADOLESCENT  
STUDENTS' SENSE OF BELONGING





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# Identifying Disconnected Students

This report uses likert-scale survey responses collected in the 2016-2017 school year. We were able to survey over 45,676 mostly middle school students from 47 states and DC enrolled in the Character Playbook course. To identify students who reported feelings of disconnectedness from their school community, we focused on student responses to three pre-course survey statements:

*Three pre-course survey statements:*

**My school community values me**

**28%**

report that their school community does not value them.

**47%**

report that their school community values them.

**I feel comfortable being the person I want to be**

**13%**

report that they do not feel comfortable being the person they want to be.

**73%**

report that they feel comfortable being the person they want to be.

**People who work at my school handle conflicts in a fair and reasonable manner**

**32%**

report that people who work at their school don't handle conflicts well.

**45%**

report that people that work at their school handle conflicts well.

Using these three likert-scale survey questions, we calculated how students score on their sense of belonging by computing the number of questions to which students responded positively (values  $\geq 5$ ) and the number of questions to which students responded negatively (values  $\leq 3$ ). We found the connected and disconnected groups based on whether their scores were  $>0$  or  $<0$ .

*We found that...*

**29%** of students don't feel a strong sense of belonging to their school community

# Implications of Not Belonging

## What other characteristics do those less connected students have?

Once the group of disconnected students was identified, we wanted to better understand what other attitudes and characteristics they had. Specifically we examined how this group answered prompts related to the positive behaviors of stepping in, helping others, and being respectful.

### Positive Student Behavior Prompts

#### STEPPING IN

- I feel prepared to identify an unhealthy or abusive relationship.
- I feel prepared to step in when someone is treating another person disrespectfully.
- I would step in if I witnessed abusive behavior in a relationship.

#### HELPING OTHERS

- I am interested in helping others with their problems.

#### BEING RESPECTFUL

- It is important to treat all people with respect.

Among the students that feel disconnected, we did not find much variance across demographic sub-groups. For the group we identified as feeling disconnected, we examined their responses to questions across a number of other important dimensions: relationship skills, compassion, and social awareness. The response to these questions could help both identify individuals that feel less connected and also reinforce the need to increase their sense of belonging so they are more likely to contribute to a positive and safe school climate.

The group of students that has a greater sense of belonging is significantly more likely to exhibit positive characteristics in their school community than students who do not feel that sense of belonging. There is a positive correlation between sense of belonging and contributing positively to the school community. While students that have a lower sense of belonging also exhibit these positive traits, they exhibit them less so than students who have a strong sense of connectedness. Traits included: being respectful, being willing and able to intervene in an unhealthy situation, and possessing a stronger sense of compassion.



The students that feel a stronger sense of belonging respond more positively to questions relating to stepping in, helping others and being respectful than students that feel less connected.

		students that feel a stronger sense of belonging	students that feel a weaker sense of belonging
<b>STEPPING IN</b>			
I feel prepared to identify an unhealthy or abusive relationship.	<b>YES</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>50%</b>
	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>18%</b>
	<b>NO</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>33%</b>
I feel prepared to step in when someone is treating another person disrespectfully.	<b>YES</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>54%</b>
	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>17%</b>
	<b>NO</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>29%</b>
I would step in if I witnessed abusive behavior in a relationship	<b>YES</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>51%</b>
	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>17%</b>
	<b>NO</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>31%</b>
<b>HELPING OTHERS</b>			
I am interested in helping others with their problems	<b>YES</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>50%</b>
	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>18%</b>
	<b>NO</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>32%</b>
<b>BEING RESPECTFUL</b>			
It is important to treat all people with respect	<b>YES</b>	<b>92%</b>	<b>66%</b>
	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>13%</b>
	<b>NO</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>22%</b>

# Summary and Implications

- **29% of students report negative feelings of connectedness.**
- **There is a positive, linear correlation between sense of belonging and likelihood to help others and treat people with respect.**
- **Those students who feel less connected to their school community are less likely to identify an abusive or unhealthy relationship and are also less likely to positively intervene in those situations.**

In a perpetually connected world, students are inundated with messages and images of who they are and should become, who their friends should be, and how they should feel about all of those relationships. The task of ensuring that every child feels a strong sense of belonging gets more difficult every day.

As we shared in this report, there is a significant number of middle school students who are not feeling connected to their school community. There is no one teacher, curriculum, or assembly that can make every student feel a strong sense of belonging. Rather, it is a daily commitment that schools make to a holistic strategy that meets the needs of their students. As schools reflect upon their strategy towards making all students feel a greater sense of belonging, here are some considerations that will hopefully help educators move this work forward:



## *Questions to Consider:*

- **What are the population-wide interventions that support every student feeling a strong sense of belonging?**
- **How do educators in your community know if a student feels connected?**
- **Does your school explicitly state what it means to be a positive member of your school community? If so, how are those values communicated to all students?**



EVERFI is the leading education technology company that provides learners of all ages education for the real world through innovative and scalable digital learning.

With the support from the United Way Worldwide, the National Football League, and Verizon, Character Playbook supported positive character development in schools for more than 83,000 students during the 2016/17 school year.

*Character Playbook - Building Healthy Relationships* is an innovative digital course that uses evidence-based strategies to educate students on how to cultivate and maintain healthy relationships during their critical middle schools years. The six lessons cover key concepts around positive character development, social-emotional learning (SEL), and building healthy relationships.

