

DHS: Office of Children's Mental Health Focuses on Strengthening Social Connections and Relationships

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Office of Children's Mental Health Director Linda Hall today announces the publication of a new fact sheet, [Strengthening Social Connections and Relationships](#), and details what our communities, schools, parents, and policymakers can do to make a difference.

Highlights

- Symptoms of emotional distress feel and look different for every youth.
- Having strong, positive, and consistent sources of social connection allows youth to talk about how they are feeling in a safe environment.
- Providing youth with positive childhood experiences (PCEs), including supportive relationships with adults and social connections with their peers, family, community, and culture can buffer symptoms of distress.
- A feeling of belonging in high school and having at least two non-parent adults who care are 2 of 7 PCEs that support youth becoming resilient.
- For teens, a social network beyond their family is important for their physical and psychological health. As teens develop their own identity, peers offer support and relief from depression, anxiety, and stress.
- Kids are socially connected when they have enough relationships to make them feel like they belong, are cared for, valued, and supported.
- In Wisconsin, 23% of kids have difficulty making and keeping friends and 40% live in neighborhoods that do not support their being socially connected.

What We Can Do

- Parents can seek out ways for their child to connect with peers early and often so children learn to foster relationships on their own.
- Teachers can promote mutual respect in the classroom by reducing any threats of a student being embarrassed or teased.
- Mental health providers can teach life skills to children so they learn how to be a good friend and maximize their opportunities to socialize.
- Policymakers can incentivize initiatives and prioritize policies that encourage models of social connectedness such as integrated care, early intervention, and collaborative activities across sectors.

See the [complete fact sheet](#)

See [previous fact sheets](#)