

# Cultivating Belonging among Immigrant Youth



Centre for  
**Youth & Society**  UVic

**Youth from immigrant families experience unique challenges to establishing a sense of belonging. Youth workers can help!**

## WHY THIS MATTERS

Establishing a sense of belonging is central to positive youth development. Immigrant children experience unique barriers to feeling connected and accepted within Canadian society. Immigrant serving agencies can draw on strategies established in the research literature to help immigrant youth foster these connections.

## KEY POINTS

### Why Belonging is Important

- ❑ Feeling a sense of belonging in school has been linked with positive academic adjustment among immigrant youth.
- ❑ Belonging across cultural contexts helps youth build a bicultural identity and successfully integrate into their settlement society.

### Challenges Immigrant Youth Face

- ❑ Being identified by others as an immigrant is linked with social exclusion in adolescence.
- ❑ Immigrant youth can feel pressure to assimilate to the ways of their host country and can feel stigmatized by peers when they act in culturally comfortable ways.
- ❑ Some research with immigrant youth has found that racism is the biggest barrier to feeling accepted.

## WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

*How Immigrant Youth Resist Marginalization and Create Belonging*

- ❑ By engaging with alternative media that does not support negative stereotypes of immigrant youth
- ❑ By taking on leadership opportunities in their schools and classrooms
- ❑ By pooling resources and working together with other immigrant youth to learn in school
- ❑ By being involved in the design and delivery of programs targeted at supporting immigrant youth
- ❑ By sharing their culture with others (e.g., showing other students the food, film, music and dances common within their cultures)
- ❑ By having opportunities to use aspects of their culture to help others (e.g., opportunities where a youth's bilingualism is an asset)



## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

### *Unique Considerations for 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> Generation Immigrant Youth*

- ❑ 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation youth may face challenges related to being an ethnic and racial minority that their parents may not have faced in their home country.
- ❑ 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> Generation youth may face challenges around confounded ethnic and racial identities. They may feel that they don't fit in because they are "too Canadian" to be accepted by their immigrant peers, but "not Canadian enough" to be accepted by their Canadian peers.
- ❑ Families can help: many cultures value giving back to one's community. Youth workers can partner with youth and families to offer opportunities for civic engagement, which has been found to help 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation youth strengthen their sense of identity and belonging.



**Key Takeaway** → *Immigrant youth work to try to cultivate a sense of belonging in response to barriers such as alienation and discrimination. Adults can help by supporting youth in their youth-driven strategies for achieving belonging and by engaging youth in intentional arts and sports activities that address these themes.*

## WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

### *What Youth Workers Can Do: Research Supported Strategies for Exploring Belonging Among Immigrant Youth*

- ❑ **Subjective Mapping:** having immigrant children draw their neighbourhoods and assign emotions to different places can tell youth workers a lot about a child's sense of belonging, and open up a conversation.
- ❑ **Create a Children's Book:** Adolescents can explore concepts of belonging, build community, and help others by creating children's books about their own experiences living across two (or more) cultures.
- ❑ **Team Sports:** Establishing strong team cohesion on sports teams with immigrant youth can help youth develop positive cultural identities and can facilitate social integration.

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