

# Syrian Children's Sense of School Belonging, Language Learning, and Mental Health

**TITLE OF RESEARCH:** **Well-being and Learning: Processes of Resilience in Refugee Children**

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**SUMMARY:** This study examined the associations between language learning, a sense of school belonging, bullying, and mental health among 126 recently resettled Syrian refugee children (6 to 13 years old) over a three-year period.

**LINK:** Click [here](#) to read the executive summary



## KEY FINDINGS

Children's **sense of school belonging decreased significantly** over time, suggesting a sense of disappointment and disillusionment possibly due to challenges faced during early resettlement.

A sense of school belonging and English language proficiency **reciprocally benefitted each other**.



Children who reported lower levels of bullying at time 1 had improved English language proficiency at time 2, suggesting a **protective social process** between experiencing less bullying soon after resettlement and language proficiency.

When children first came to Canada, they exhibited mental health problems in the form of **externalizing behaviours**, however, this decreased over the next two years. Children with higher English language competency showed a faster decrease in externalizing behaviours, whereas children in larger families with lower parental education showed a slower decrease.



## Recommendations:

- Schools should create more opportunities for English language learning through formal instruction (e.g., courses) and informal methods (e.g., peer mentoring, English language circles, etc.)
- Teachers and schools need to find ways to foster positive relationship for students recently arrived in Canada, for example, through activities or sports that can be done non-verbally.
- Service providers and policymakers should address resource limitations within refugee families by offering educational support for parents, providing financial assistance to alleviate economic burdens, providing children from large families with increased access to adults that speak the host country language and can support children in their schoolwork, incorporating sibling support programs within settlement services, and providing opportunities for joint language learning among siblings.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Child and Youth Refugee Research Coalition.

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