

PARENTING NEWSLETTER

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The Need to Belong

Why Feeling Included Matters to Every Child

Dear Parents,

Imagine your child entering a playground where everyone is already playing in groups. They stand nearby, hoping someone will invite them to join. Or imagine your teenager laughing along with friends, even when they feel uncomfortable, simply because they do not want to be left out.

Would we notice? Would our children tell us? As parents, we often focus on our children's academic progress, achievements, behaviour and future goals. But there is another important aspect of growing up that deserves our attention: the need to feel accepted, included and valued.

This October, as we observe World Mental Health Day, let us explore how the simple experience of belonging can contribute to children's well-being and how we, as parents, can help nurture it.



Supportive relationships at home, among peers and at school all contribute to children's sense of connection.



Belonging means feeling accepted without having to hide who we are.



The goal is not to solve every friendship problem for our children, but to help them feel heard and equip them to handle these situations.

"Every child deserves to feel that there is a place for them."

How Can Parents Nurture a Sense of Belonging?



1. Make home a place where every voice matters.

Invite children to express their opinions and participate in age-appropriate family decisions. Listen even when their views differ from yours. Children who experience respect at home have opportunities to practise expressing themselves in other settings.

2. Avoid comparisons.

Statements such as “Your cousin has so many friends” or “Why can't you be more like your classmate?” can make children feel that acceptance must be earned. Appreciate your child's individual qualities and interests instead.

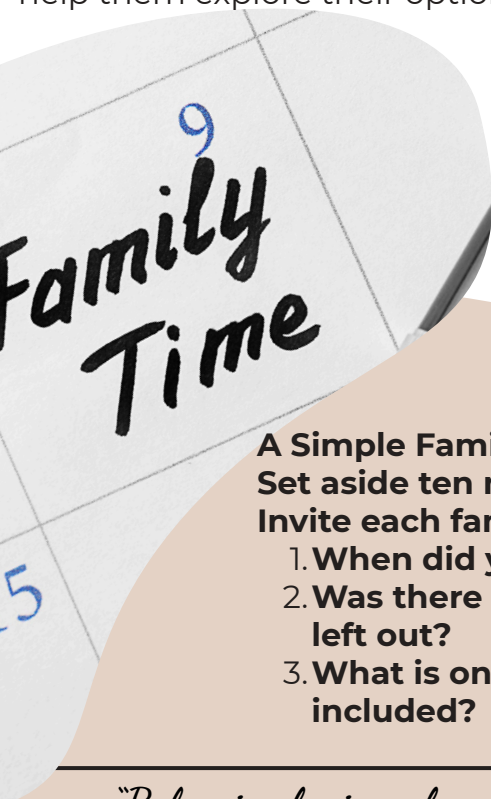
3. Help them find their own circle.

Encourage participation in activities they genuinely enjoy, whether it is sports, music, dance, art, reading or community events. Children do not need to fit into every group; they can build meaningful connections around shared interests.



4. Listen before offering solutions.

If your child says they were left out, avoid immediately dismissing the experience with “It's not a big deal” or rushing to contact the other children. First, understand what happened. Ask what they would like to do next and help them explore their options.



5. Teach inclusion through everyday actions.

Children learn from what we do. Greeting a new neighbour, treating service staff respectfully, welcoming a new family or making space for someone who feels left out teaches children that inclusion begins with small, ordinary gestures.

A Simple Family Activity: The Belonging Check-In

Set aside ten minutes during dinner, a family walk or bedtime this week.

Invite each family member to share their thoughts on three questions:

1. When did you feel included or welcomed this week?
2. Was there a time when you felt left out, or noticed someone else being left out?
3. What is one small thing we can do this week to help someone feel included?

“Belonging begins when a child knows they don't have to become someone else to be accepted.”