

KNOW! TO CREATE BELONGING FOR ALL

JULY, 2025



As young people grow, they begin to develop their own sense of identity. Youth tend to be especially aware of the shifts happening within them, from the way they see themselves to how they want to be seen by others. Identity can include many dimensions, like race, gender, family background, ability, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, and faith. During this time, youth may start questioning their values, setting personal goals, and exploring new forms of self-expression.

As caring adults, we may not always understand what young people are going through. Still, we can play a powerful role in helping them feel supported, confident, and like they belong. These crucial supports protect young people from risks like mental health issues, substance use, and violence.¹

SIX WAYS TO BUILD BELONGING THROUGH EVERYDAY CONVERSATIONS:

Share your Stories

Talking about identity can be tough, and everyone's experiences differ. Help youth feel comfortable by sharing stories about your family, experiences, background and challenges you've overcome. By opening up, you signal that it's okay to explore and talk about identity.

Model vulnerability by telling a short story from your own life, then invite your youth to share.

Try saying: "When I was your age, I remember struggling to fit in because of [insert detail—e.g., my accent, my clothes, or my religion]. It took time for me to feel proud of that part of who I am. Has anything like that ever happened to you?"

TALKING TIP

Use Media to Spark Conversation

Many TV shows, movies, and books discuss aspects of identity, including race, religion, gender, and sexual identity. Choose a piece of media with your youth and then talk about what you both thought.

Try asking, "How did [character]'s religion affect the decisions they made? Would you have made the same decision?"

TALKING TIP

Keep an Open Mind

Stay open to your teen having a different perspective from you. When youth share something that surprises you, try to stay calm, listen closely, and keep the lines of communication open. Curiosity, not judgment, helps create belonging.

Model openness by saying, "Tell me more about this," or "What else would you like to share?"

TALKING TIP

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Model Respectful Behavior

Teens watch how we respond to differences, not just in them but in others. Ask your youth what they need to feel respected and seen. This might include honoring pronouns, supporting their style choices, or avoiding certain language. Additionally, inform your teen of your expectations regarding the use of slang or offensive terms, and be sure to follow your own rules.

Have a two-way conversation about respect.

Try asking: "I want to make sure I'm showing you respect in the ways that matter to you. Are there things I say or do that feel supportive, or things I could do differently?"

TALKING TIP

Connect with Others

Belonging thrives in community. Build relationships with people whose backgrounds differ from your own and encourage your youth to do the same. Attending community events can be a great way to start forging connections and model respectful behavior toward others.

If your child doesn't share your identity, help them connect with others who do. These connections can offer relatable role models and reinforce the message that they are not alone.

TALKING TIP

Speak Out Against Bullying and Harassment

Sadly, many young people face bullying because of who they are. Youth who are LGBTQ+, have disabilities, or belong to racial or ethnic minority groups are especially at risk. If you see bullying or hear about it, speak up. Your voice and example teach your child to do the same.

Encourage young people to take responsibility for how they treat others. Ask, "How do you help others feel welcome at school or in our home? What do you do when someone else is being unkind or unwelcoming?"

TALKING TIP

Belonging Starts With You

Creating a sense of belonging doesn't require grand gestures. It begins with consistent, everyday actions. Whether you're sharing your story, listening with empathy, or standing up for others, you're showing your youth that they matter. That simple message can make all the difference.

RESOURCES

- [Race, Ethnicity, National Origin & Religion | Stopbullying.gov](#)
- [Bullying and Youth with Disabilities and Special Health Needs | Stopbullying.gov](#)
- [How to Foster Belonging in Teens | Arkbuilders](#)
- [Gearing Up for Summer? Ensure Youth Feel a Sense of Belonging in Your Summer Program | Search Institute](#)
- [Social Belonging and Confidence | Mental Health America](#)
- [Belonging Boosts Kids' Mental Health | Kids Mental Health Foundation](#)

Numbered sources are hyperlinked

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