



imagine if

Building Belonging at Home

Getting Started



Talk to kids about the difference between “belonging” and “fitting in”

Kids of all ages need reminders that “you are loved just the way you are.” As researcher Brené Brown encourages, we can talk to our kids openly about ways to build a feels on the outside of friends or groups, how do we encourage each other to continue to show up as and for ourselves?



Notice your reactions

Some of us were raised to fit in or faced significant challenges because we didn't fit in. In this case, it can be very stressful to watch our kids show up in ways that don't fit our perception of the norm. Try saying, “When I was a kid I was taught that I needed to fit in (to stay safe, to be loved, to make friends, etc...). I want to teach you a different way. Let's practice together.” Prepare to respond with love and care when kids share things that are important to them. For example, “I don't have words for everything right now but this is what I do know: I love you and I am so grateful you shared this with me.”



Acknowledge that building or seeking belonging is brave

If parts of our kids' identities, abilities, or experiences aren't centered or supported, acknowledge how painful this can be. Belonging often requires that we stand up for ourselves and what we believe in even when it is hard. Remind kids that they deserve to experience belonging.



Cultivate curiosity and listen to understand

It's easy to slip into thinking we know all there is to know about our kids (and each other!). Curiosity helps us pause our assumptions in order to listen, observe, and learn. When we model this kind of curiosity within our families, our kids are more likely to stay curious and open to the opinions and experiences of others well.



Flush out toxins to belonging

Building spaces of belonging means raising kids who can practice empathy, stand for compassion, build authentic relationships, and are able to disrupt actions or words that are unfair or hurtful. This includes helping kids “spot and stop” different forms of bias through stories, conversation, and active skill building.



Practice emotional courage

The lessons we learn about feelings are powerful. From a very young age we are taught in both spoken and unspoken ways which feelings (and associated behaviors) are welcome and which aren't. Instead of punishing or avoiding emotions, coach them instead. This is a time to prioritize raising emotionally courageous kids.



Tell family stories

Belonging is about knowing that we are connected to each other. Throughout childhood and adolescence, kids are busily asking questions like, “Who are we? What do we care about? How do we take care of each other?” Family stories can highlight the unique strengths and gifts of each person in the family and highlight the ways that we have navigated uncertainty, challenge and joy together. The best part? You can add new chapters as you go.



Create family rituals

Family rituals are sometimes referred to as the “glue that holds families together.” Seeing parenting rituals as glue acknowledges reminds us that ritual and connection aren't about perfection. It is about making spaces for relationship and repair – the things that hold us together. Start with something small, memorable, repeatable, and clear. It could be something that you say, a place you go, something you do, listen to, or read together. There is no right or wrong here, because parenting rituals are unique to you.