



MindPeace

A MindPeace Resource



Classroom Belonging Activities, Elementary School

This resource was developed to **support belonging education within elementary classroom settings**. However, these activities alone will not be enough to foster a sense of belonging for all students. Instead, consider this guide as one small tool within your classroom toolkit. Other **key ways** to foster classroom engagement include:

- ▶ Building personal relationships with each student
- ▶ Establishing classroom norms of mutual respect and kindness
- ▶ Fostering cooperative learning through group activities
- ▶ Creating a physically and psychologically safe environment by addressing negative social-emotional behaviors and/or peer conflicts in real time and with effectiveness
- ▶ Inviting students to be co-creators of their learning, and, much more.
- ▶ For additional ideas, visit [MindPeace's Guide to Fostering Classroom Connection and Belonging](#).

Bi-monthly Belonging Activities:



▶ Note

These activities are not dependent on one another and can be done in any order.

This means you can start wherever you are now without waiting until August!

Note: We leap-frogged over December in recognition that you likely already have belonging-rich activities baked into your pre-holiday break schedule.

August/ Back-to-school - Set the stage for belonging (15 minutes)

Step #1: Show this *Building COMMUNITY ♥ in the Classroom* [video](#) (4:20)

Step #2: Spend 10 minutes as a class discussing the question at the end of the video - "What is one way you can help someone feel like they belong?"

- **Note:** We purposely kept this activity short with no prep, because we understand how busy the new school year can be!

October - Belonging check-in with ourselves (20-25 minutes)

Step #1: Show this [video](#) (3:38) or share the [book](#), *A Kids Book About Belonging*, by Kevin Carroll with your students.

Step #2: Ask students what they think 'belonging to yourself' means. As you are doing so, ask a helper to pass out a template for an '**I am**' exercise. [This one](#) is free from the National Gallery of Art, but feel free to select your own based on which prompts might work best for your class and ages of students.

Step #3: Provide time for students to complete their '**I am**' poems using the templates provided.





Step #4: Invite students to pair up with a neighbor and share their **'I am'** poems. Set the stage by reminding students that as the listener, their job is to listen, stay curious, and (after the poem is shared) to share 1-2 things they find interesting or may have in common with the reader.

Step #5: As you wrap up the activity, invite students to continue to be curious about themselves and what makes them uniquely them. The more we know and appreciate about ourselves, the easier it is for us to connect with others.

January - You are the missing piece! (20-30 minutes; plus teacher prep)

This activity is a great way to reinforce classroom belonging upon returning from winter break.

Step #1: Create giant personalized puzzle pieces for each student in your classroom. Check out this [video](#) for ideas or simply take a rectangular piece of paper and cut out puzzle-like pieces for each student.

Step #2: Distribute the puzzle pieces to each student and ask them to decorate their puzzle piece.



Pro Tip

To take this activity up a notch, ask students to include words, photos, or drawings on their puzzle piece which represent their interests, strengths, etc.

- **Short on time?** Distribute the puzzle pieces the night before (or a few days in advance) and ask the students to decorate them for a homework assignment. The tricky part here is that you can't complete step #3 until ALL student puzzle pieces have been returned. This is key!

Step #3: Show this *From Acceptance to Belonging* [video](#) (3:20) to your class.

Step #4: Invite students to create their classroom puzzle.

- Verbally affirm each student (or better yet - invite the students to do so for one another) by highlighting each students' interests, strengths, etc. once the puzzle is complete.
- Reinforce Listening and Speaking Standards by having them share their puzzle piece before adding it to the group creation.



▶ **Pro Tip**

Younger students? Create a replica outline of the full puzzle as a whole (with puzzle piece shapes outlined), so that students can focus on finding where their particular puzzle piece fits. This will allow you to invite students up one at a time and will help minimize any chaos with this process.

March - Normalizing our innate need to belong (20-25 minutes plus emoji sign prep time)

Step #1: Prep simple emoji signs (4-5) for each student using a template and popsicle sticks. Or, better yet, give them templates so they can create their own.

- Simple [Canva option](#) (print and attach to the top of popsicle sticks)
- More [hands-on option](#) (guide students in making their own; more supplies needed for this version)
- **Note:** This activity can be completed on a different day in case that works better for your schedule.

Step #2: Show *The Need for Belonging* [video](#) (2:07) to your class.

Step #3: Distribute the emoji signs or ask students to get them out (if recently created). As you ask the class the following questions, ask them to answer with an emoji. Be sure to comment on the themes of the replies you're seeing in the form of emojis (For example: "Looks like some folks felt a little sad while watching the video, some of you felt happy and others seemed surprised.")

- How did watching this video make you feel?
- How does it feel when someone invites you to sit with them at lunch or play together at recess?
- How do you feel when you see a friend sitting alone on a bench?
- How does it feel when you make a new friend?
- **Note:** Customize additional questions based on your specific classroom experiences. For older students, you may want to use the emoji responses as a doorway to further conversation. Just be sure to avoid the 'group therapy' trap. While we want to normalize all feelings, deep sharing is often best suited for structured safe environments where there is a low risk for a student's vulnerability being weaponized against them.

Step #4: Ask students the question - "*How can we do a better job of helping others feel more welcome and included?*" and record their collective responses on the board and praise students when you see them try out the ideas you've discussed.

• **Some starter ideas include:**

- Smile more often
- Offer a compliment
- Look out for those who may be on their own
- Introduce new students to your friends
- Stay curious - ask questions
- **Wrap up idea:** Whenever you discuss a topic with a potential to trigger big emotions, it can be helpful to lead a simple movement activity with the class to help them shake off any big feelings from their body and resettle into learning mode. One simple option is an impromptu 1-2 minute dance party. Pull up a fun, student-friendly song on your phone and invite students to move.



Pro Tip

For any kids who struggle with a sense of belonging, this discussion could bring up some undesirable feelings. Be sure to watch for any students who seem withdrawn or particularly upset during discussions and invite them to have a follow-up conversation with your school counselor.

References:

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