

BELONGING

What is this developmental skill?

Belonging is the feeling of being accepted, included, and valued within a family, school, and community. It gives children confidence that they have a place where they are loved and supported.

How does this normally develop?

Children develop a sense of belonging through consistent family relationships, friendships, school experiences, traditions, and community involvement. Feeling included helps children develop confidence and emotional security.

How can neglect interfere?

Children who experience neglect often feel disconnected from others. Family instability, multiple placements, or repeated relationship losses can leave them uncertain about where they fit or whether they truly belong. Even after entering a safe home, they may continue expecting rejection or exclusion.

What might this look like?

A child may:

- Feel like an outsider in social situations.
- Push others away before becoming close.
- Have difficulty trusting friendships.
- Frequently ask for reassurance that they are staying.
- Test caregivers to see whether they will remain committed.
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Parenting Implications

Create opportunities for connection through family routines, traditions, shared activities, and meaningful roles within the household. Reassure your child through consistent words and actions that they are a permanent and valued member of the family.

From Understanding to Attunement

A sense of belonging is built through everyday experiences of inclusion. Each shared meal, family tradition, and dependable relationship reminds your child, "You have a place here, and you matter."