

I WANT TO BELONG - PRETEENS

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At the beginning of creation God provided Adam with a mate because He said it was 'not good for Man to be alone'. We were not meant to exist in isolation. We were made to thrive on the companionship and love from others.

Well-known behavioral researcher, Abraham Maslow, believes that we have 5 hierarchical levels of need. The lowest and first level is for survival – food, water, warmth etc. When these needs are met, the next is to feel safe and secure. The third level is the need to feel a sense of belonging. He states that the 'need to belong' is a vital requirement to life and that we need to feel we belong to (be accepted by) a family, tribe, group, or clan. The alternative is feeling we're isolated in the world, which is not only lonely, but it is unsafe. A child that is consistently neglected may either develop a sub-self that remains terrified of abandonment throughout life, or, alternatively, creates a protective mechanism that does not allow him/her to get close to anyone through life.

It is imperative that we feel a sense of belonging - to one another, to the wider family, to other groups, to our culture, and our country. How do we generate the sense of 'belonging?' Belonging is bonding. Belonging is derived from intimacy, caring, sharing, listening, commitment to one another, and giving others AND ourselves personal worth. What negates this sense of belonging is a fragile or warring environment, criticism or taunting, lack of acceptance by others, withdrawn love or commitment by others, or threat of harm and neglect.

There have only been a few times in my life when I have felt a loss of belonging. These have been through structural changes at home or at work. I became afraid because the person I cared for and relied on no longer felt committed to me. I felt I was suddenly cut adrift and alone. When families break up, the 'fabric' of belonging becomes compromised and it takes some time for trust, love and intimacy to be re-established in the new group dynamic. Kids can easily lose their sense of belonging when they move from the safety of home into another environment such as school. This demands they re-establish an identity and feeling of safety within the new group, which has entirely different agendas or expectations than the family group they belong to.

If you were to think of what makes you feel an accepted part of a group, work place, or relationship, then this will help you to know how to nurture the same feeling in your kids. When kids become withdrawn, unhappy, afraid and negative, that is the time to seriously look at the tone and atmosphere in the family or group that child is in.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.