

Ways to gently build and support a sense of belonging

Belonging supports the body in ways that go beyond words or intention. Someone can be surrounded by people and still not feel that they belong. For healing to occur, it is not just connection that matters but safe, consistent experiences of belonging.

Building

You don't have to force connection – go at your own pace.

1. Start with “safe enough,” not perfect

Belonging doesn't mean feeling completely safe all the time – even small moments of staying present and feeling safe enough matter.

2. Build capacity before intensity

If connection feels overwhelming, start slowly with short interactions, in low-pressure environments which are predictable. Your nervous system needs time to adjust.

3. Notice and pace your emotions

If your feelings become overwhelming or confusing, your system is signalling that it needs support. You can respond by slowing down, taking a break, using some grounding strategies or returning when it feels more manageable.

4. Look for attuned, consistent people

Healing relationships often feel respectful, responsive and steady rather than intense, predictable and demanding. If it feels right, you might choose a therapist, a trusted friend or peer. Trauma-informed therapy or peer support can help you build emotional capacity safely, process experiences gradually or develop new ways of relating. This is not about pushing through but about being supported.

5. Use co-regulation in simple ways

Co-regulation does not have to involve deep conversation. It can happen when you're sitting quietly with someone, walking alongside them, sharing a simple activity or even being with a pet. Being “with” can be enough.

6. Respect protective parts of you

The part of you that pulls away is trying to protect you and keep you safe. You can go slowly.

Supporting

You do not need to “fix” anything. In fact, trying to fix can sometimes increase pressure. What matters most is how you show up.

1. Focus on safety, not intensity

Healing relationships are not built through intensity or urgency. They are built through consistency, predictability and emotional steadiness. Simple, reliable interactions are often more helpful than big gestures.

2. Go at the person’s pace

You may want to connect more quickly or deeply than the other person can manage. Try to respect the person’s boundaries, give them space when they need it and avoid pushing for more than feels comfortable for them.

3. Be emotionally attuned

Attunement means noticing and responding to how someone is feeling, not just what they are saying. This might mean listening without interrupting or trying to solve anything, reflecting back what you hear and staying curious rather than making assumptions. Even small moments of feeling understood can be powerful.

4. Normalise and validate

Trauma responses can feel confusing or induce shame for the person you care about. You can help by acknowledging that their reactions make sense, trying not to judge them or minimise their reaction and reinforcing that they are not “too much” or “not enough”. Validating their responses helps reduce shame and supports connection.

5. Expect mixed signals

Someone may seek closeness one moment and withdraw the next. This is common with trauma and reflects internal conflict between the need for connection and the need for safety. Try not to take this personally.

6. Support the person to regulate through your presence

You don’t always need to talk. You can support the person by sitting quietly together, sharing a simple activity or being physically present in a calm way. Your calm steady presence can be supportive for their nervous system.

7. Be patient with the process

Healing through connection takes time. It often involves building emotional capacity, developing trust gradually and having many small, positive experiences over time.

It’s also important to know that progress may not be linear.

8. Take care of yourself too

Supporting a person with complex trauma experiences can be meaningful but it can also be challenging. It's important for you to maintain your own boundaries, seek support when you need to and not take full responsibility for another person's healing. You are part of the person's support system; you are not responsible for their healing.

