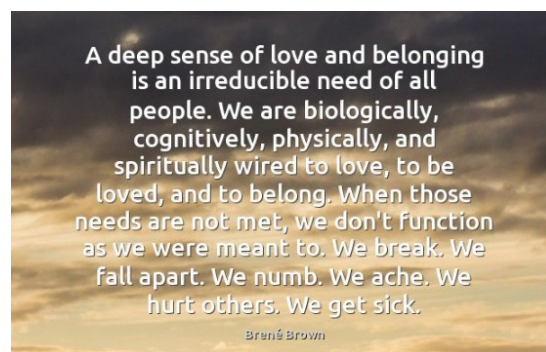


Creating Belonging Through Connections

Belonging is the biological imperative to be part of a group, and to connect to others in a way that allows you to be your whole self. This may sound simple, but in the post pandemic world, the research shows that people are reporting a lack of meaningful connection with others at alarming levels. Living with loneliness has been identified as elevating the risk of early mortality by a shocking 45%. Given that this connection - this belonging - is critical to our wellbeing, ways of creating and deepening connections with others is a great topic for us to consider in the first month of school.



Let's start with the really easy ones:

- Smile. Yes, smile. 😊 You never know when a heartfelt smile will have an invaluable effect on another, so dish them out early and often.
- Make eye contact. Eye contact is another easy and surprisingly effective way to connect. It cultivates trust and a feeling of safety, which in turn allows another to open up as well.
- Listen. Really listen. Listening does well as connection super-booster. We can add being present and focused on the other as part of really effective listening. Give them your full attention.
- Lend support to others. Happiness is highly correlated to lending support to others.
- Show appreciation. Gratitude is linked to happiness and joy. When you express gratitude, you tend to feel better about yourself and others. Studies show that when people hear someone express gratitude they are more likely to believe they can form a meaningful relationship with them because of the constructive connotation of appreciation.
- Make the first move. Intentionally take the time to connect to another. Smile, say "Hi" ask a question, give a genuine compliment or offer to help them.

Now for the ones that perhaps require a bit more thought:



- Invest in yourself. Take a self-reflective journey. Gain insight and understanding about your patterns and beliefs, the narratives that impact your thoughts, like the trees in fall, **let go of anything that no longer serves you.** Make the choice to live in a way that is in harmony with your intent and what you want in your life.
- Actively love. Practice doing things for and with people that demonstrate your love. Practice random acts of kindness, express yourself from a loving place.
- Bridge social capital. Social capital is defined as the connections within and between social networks as well as connections among individuals. Social capital is often correlated with increased/improved information networks, access to power and opportunities and resources. Bridging social capital is the process of creating connections that link people that are more likely not to connect because of differences in race, class, religion, etc. It is essentially networking outside your normal social groupings. It allows for the sharing and exchange of information, ideas and innovation. Creating and strengthening networks by bridging helps to ensure

equitable access to a variety of necessities for all, and builds the culture of belonging we want for our staff, students, families and communities.

What steps can you take to increase connection for yourself and others?