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# Facts For You

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## SENSE OF BELONGING



### What Is a Sense of Belonging?

A sense of belonging is a vital social component of human life that goes beyond acceptance into a group.

Wikipedia describes belongingness as the human emotional need to be an accepted member of a group, like family, friends, co-workers, religion and so on. Some people tend to have an 'inherent' desire to belong to and be part of important group.

Belonging is a strong feeling that exists in human nature. This is universal desire found across all cultures and different types of people.

A **sense of belonging** is a basic human need, with many psychologists discussing this need as being at the level of importance of that as food, water, and shelter. A sense of belonging can be so powerful that it can create both value in life and the ability to learn healthy coping skills when experiencing intensive and painful emotions.

A sense of belonging involves more than simply being acquainted with other people. It is centered on gaining acceptance, attention, and support from members of the group as well as providing the same attention to other members.

In social psychology, the need to belong is an intrinsic motivation to affiliate with others and be socially accepted. This need plays a role in a number of social phenomena such as self-presentation and social comparison. Social belonging is the subjective feeling of inclusion or acceptance into a group of people. This sense of community or connectedness in a social group is a basic human need that individuals must satisfy to maintain their identity, physical well-being, and mental health.

### **A Brief Introduction to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

Abraham Maslow, a social psychology professor from New York, determined a sense of belonging—along with several other factors, including safety, esteem, and self-actualization—was a powerful motivator of human behavior. In his 1943 essay, "A Theory of Human Motivation," he outlined the tenet that became "Maslow's hierarchy of needs" in the field of psychology.

Maslow's theory categorizes the physiological resources adults need to survive and the emotional resources they must acquire to develop their authentic selves. Professionals in psychology, psychiatry, sociology, and other scientific fields often illustrate Maslow's hierarchy as a pyramid, with physical survival needs near the essential base and self-actualization at the pinnacle. Love, self-esteem, and belonging usually fall in the middle of a Maslow's hierarchy of needs pyramid.

### **Why Is a Sense of Belonging Important?**

A sense of belonging is crucial to a person's physical and mental well-being.

- **A sense of belonging fosters opportunity for growth.** According to Maslow, individuals are often unable to pursue cognitive, aesthetic, and self-actualization needs until they have satisfied more basic ones—namely, their physiological, safety, belonging, and esteem needs. In other words, people who have met their basic

needs (or deficiency needs) will, in theory, find themselves better equipped physically and mentally to grow to their full potential.

- **Isolation can be life-threatening.** Humans have long relied on communication and social cohesion to survive difficult times. While social identity fails to meet a need as fundamental as food or shelter, it's still a predictor of survival in many situations. Consider life-threatening challenges in a hunter-gatherer society where human used to work, hunt, and collect food in organized groups, sharing essential tasks and protecting one another from predators and enemies.
- **Validation is necessary for mental health.** Neurological chemistry motivates people to seek out social connection in a support group—regardless of whether or not they live in a hunter-gatherer society. If a human denies this instinctual programming, they might experience decrease in physical and mental health.

### **Sense of Belonging in Action**

What inspires people to seek out specific groups? In many cases, the need to belong to certain social groups results from sharing some point of commonality. For example, teens who share the same taste in clothing, music, and other interests might seek each other out to form friendships. Other factors that can lead individuals to seek out groups include:

- Pop culture interests
- Religious beliefs
- Shared goals
- Socioeconomic status

People often present themselves in a particular way in order to belong to a specific social group. For example, a new member of a high school sports team might adopt the dress and mannerisms of the other members of the team in order to fit in with the rest of the group.

People also spend a great deal of time comparing themselves to other members of the group in order to determine how well they fit in. This social comparison might lead an individual to adopt some of the same behaviors and attitudes of the most prominent members of the group in order to conform and gain greater acceptance.

## Effect of Belongingness

Our need to belong is what drives us to seek out stable, long-lasting relationships with other people. It also motivates us to participate in social activities such as clubs, sports teams, religious groups, and community organizations.

## Increase Your Sense of Belonging

There are steps you can take to increase sense of belonging.

- **Make an effort.** Creating a sense of belonging takes effort, to put yourself out there, seek out activities and groups of people with whom you have common interests, and engage with others.
- **Be patient.** It might take time to gain acceptance, attention, and support from members of the group.
- **Practice acceptance.** Focus on the similarities, not the differences, that connect you to others, and remain open to new ways of thinking.

## How to Promote a Sense of Belonging at Work

Follow these simple guidelines to create a welcoming environment at your workplace:

- **Encourage open dialogue without judgment.** Provide opportunities for people to share their thoughts and feelings without fear of persecution or retaliation. Establish an open platform and give each member of a group adequate time and attention so they can voice their perspective. These sessions can lead to honest social interactions and improved team chemistry.
- **Promote social support and special interest groups.** People tend to gravitate toward people with similar hobbies and worldviews. Allow colleagues, co-workers, to organize clubs and common interest groups. Increased engagement in these groups can improve morale. This, in turn, can lead to an increase in talent retention and efficiency.
- **Show respect and use inclusive language.** Use respectful language and strictly forbid any form of bullying. This can be a significant contributing factor in the development of behavioral and social issues. Organize campaigns to denounce bullying and improve your sense of belonging within an organization.

## **Conclusion**

A sense of belonging is a crucial for good physical and mental health. If you continue to struggle with loneliness or the sense of not fitting in, talk to your doctor or mental health professional. They can help you to identify the root of your feelings and provide strategies for achieving belongingness.

**(Reference : Internet Resources)**

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