

Supporting belonging and mental well-being



Children's Mental Health Week (9-15 February 2026): This is My Place

Helping children reflect on their past, understand their present and feel hopeful about their future helps foster a sense of belonging, supporting positive mental health and well-being.

Understanding their past helps children answer important questions such as: *Who am I? Where do I come from? Who keeps me safe?* This secure foundation allows children to feel more confident when exploring new experiences, meeting new people and building relationships, and developing independence.

Children achieve the most positive outcomes when they are placed at the centre of the experience. Play provides valuable opportunities for children to explore identity and belonging in a safe and meaningful way.

Loose parts (free and found materials), recycled materials, and old clothing encourage creativity and role play, allowing children to explore who they are and who they may become. Using loose parts, children can build models of their favourite place to be, their favourite people, or their favourite meal ... making choices through exploring colours, textures, stories, and music. Creating opportunities for children to express their own interests and take control of the outcome is a great way to help build those firm foundations.

Learning about family history can strengthen a child's sense of belonging, especially as they grow older. Looking at old photographs, sharing stories, playing traditional games, or cooking a favourite family recipe can help children build connections with the past. Children may enjoy dressing up or role-playing, or interviewing family members - discovering and understanding through play.

Belonging is also developed through connection to the present. Encouraging children to explore their home, school, and wider community helps them understand where they live and who is part of their world. Discussing similarities and differences, or celebrating diverse community festivals, supports curiosity and understanding. Activities such as drawing maps from memory of the route to school or to a friend's house, noticing landmarks along the way, creating stories and adventures, and observing changes over time all strengthen this connection. Through play, children make sense of what they see and opportunities for free exploration further nurture curiosity and understanding.

Sharing small acts of kindness such as creating artwork or crafting cards for neighbours, leaving little painted pebbles in local spots, or making nature pictures in your local forest or beach helps children feel valued and connected to their environment.

Providing children with choice and opportunities to ask questions helps them feel safe, confident and secure. When children feel listened to and involved, their sense of belonging and well-being grows.

Children are not things to be moulded, but people to be unfolded.

- Jess Lair