A Community of Belonging

It takes intentional planning to help some students develop meaningful, age-appropriate friendships. We've included examples of classroom discussions and activities, parent handouts, and an example from a Member School. You'll find these resources and more on the Member Center at allbelong.org/member-center.

Every student in the school is an inclusion kid
It’s not about them, it’s about us

Share Information
If you can’t talk about it, you can’t understand it

Spread Awareness
Champion differences

How do I talk with my class about this?

Puzzle Piece Perspective
- We all have strengths and challenges
- No all-pink people
- No all-green people
- Puzzle pieces fit together
- You go first
  - “But in fact, God has arranged the parts of the body, each one of them, just as He wanted them to be.” – 1 Corinthians 12:18
  - “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” – Romans 15:7

Communicate with Parents
- Listen first
- Get permission
- Agree on how to describe the child’s needs
Social Belonging Resources

**Share Information**
- Marshmallows and socks
- Level of greetings
- Send information home

**Keys**
- A key opens up different parts of our brain
- We get our keys at different times
- It’s not wrong or bad, it’s just different

**Bull’s Eye**
- People we love
- People we like
- Groups we belong to
- People who are payed to be with us

**Tips About Me**
- This is me: brochure, pictures,
  Share with adults in your school community

**Resources**
Available at allbelong.org/shop
- Inclusion Awareness Kit
- Body Building: Devotions to Celebrate Inclusive Community by Barbara J. Newman
- Helping Kids Include Kids with Disabilities by Barbara J. Newman
- Your Feet, My Shoes by Sarah Bolt

**Children's Books**
- All Kinds of Friends, Even Green! By Ellen Senisi
- Be Good to Eddie Lee by Virginia Fleming
- Don’t Call Me Special by Pat Thomas
- Little Rainman: Autism—Through the Eyes of a Child by Karen Simmons

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Whole Class: Circle of Friends

Examples of parent notes

Sharing information with parents is important. Send home a summary of your conversation.

I know what I want to say!

Mrs. Tubergen showed pictures of her dog Ruger and shared some fun stories. It was easy to understand her, until the marshmallows. Ask your child what it sounds like when someone has 6 big marshmallows stuffed in their mouth. Mrs. T kept on talking because she was in the middle of a great story!

Sometimes it can be hard for people to tell others what they are thinking, how they are feeling, or what they want to do. It can be hard joining a conversation or getting the attention of a friend. We learned that Charlie’s tongue can get in his way, but he still has great ideas to share, and super funny jokes to tell. He showed us some of the tongue exercises that he does two times a day.

You are a good friend to Charlie when you…

- say “Hi” when you see him. Don’t wait for Charlie to say “Hi” first.
- ask Charlie to play with you on the playground.
- talk about things you both enjoy.
- say “Charlie, show me...” if you don’t understand what he is saying.
- stay quiet and let Charlie talk. Remember, he knows what he wants to say!

Charlie is a good friend when he…

- helps pick up after center time.
- notices someone needs a tissue and jumps up to get it.
- shares his lunch – after asking the teacher 😊.
- shares funny jokes.
- gives the best pushes ever on the swing.
Talk with your son/daughter about what makes him/her a good friend.

**Levels of Greetings and Squeezes**

5 Super tight squeeze– save for home or with adults
4 Light side hug – siblings, close friend, teachers
3 High five or fist bump (blow it up)
2 Hula Hoop space and say “HI”
1 Wave

If you walked by our room today, you may have observed some serious hugging, high-fives, and fist bumps. The kids learned that some of us like bear hugs, and others feel like they are going to die when squeezed too tight. Some of us don’t mind accidentally getting bumped in line, while others feel like they just got punched, and are going to die. Some of us prefer soft high-fives, while others like to “blow it up” with a fist bump. We practiced the words to use when we don’t like how a peer greets us.

Ask your child about the reminder card we have hanging in our room.
Understanding Directions

We were given several objects and then asked to do something specific with them. But the directions were given in a different language.

Mrs. Tubergen talked louder; this didn’t help.
Mrs. Tubergen talked slower; this didn’t help.
Mrs. Tubergen talked to us like we were in preschool; this didn’t help. It did make some of us mad.

The kids were confused! The kids were frustrated!

Until this picture was shown.

We can be a good friend to others by...

- showing a friend how to play a game.
- looking towards a person when you’re talking.
- saying “Let me show you.”
- being patient.
- remembering we are friends. Nobody needs another mom or dad or teacher bossing us around.

Ask your son/daughter one thing they can do tomorrow to be a good friend.
Keys Lesson
Class Talk for Lower Elementary
This is a great lesson to use with the whole class!

Main Focus:
- Keys open up or unlock parts of our brain.
- We all have parts of our brain that are “unlocked” or opened.
- We all have parts that are still “locked”.
- Let’s pretend God makes a set of keys for each of us. No two sets of keys are made the same, it’s made especially for you. This means, we will not all learn the same thing....at the same time.....the exact same way!
- Does this mean if a student is working on something that I already have my key for, they are wrong, or behind? NO, IT’S DIFFERENT, BUT NOT WRONG.

The lesson below is adapted from Helping Kids Include Kids with Disabilities by Barbara J. Newman. The lesson can be found on page 29 and is within the section on introducing a student who has autism spectrum disorder.
Keys Lesson

Lesson: Show the students a set of keys.

What do we do with these keys? Use them to unlock or start things. Let’s pretend when you were born, God made a set of keys just for you. Each key opens up the part of your brain that knows how to do something. Hold up a key from the ring and identify something you know everyone in the room can do.

How many of you have the key that opens the part of your brain that knows how to walk? How many of you have the key that opens the “drink from a cup” part of your brain? Continue with examples, kids can practice the action to allow for movement. Start with examples that are achieved by all the members, then introduce keys that all the students will not have.

A few examples: Who has the key for...

- raise my hand and wait to be called on
- ride a two-wheel bike
- color in the lines
- read the word wall words
- stick with my partner while playing a game

When you get to the point of some students not having the key say, "Wait a minute, so does this mean some of the kids are right, and some are wrong? No, IT’S DIFFERENT. Because God made a pretend set for each of us that means we won’t all learn the same thing, at the same time, the exact same way."

Let’s think about a key you may have, that a friend may not have yet. Can we help friends get their keys? What does that look like? Give examples from your classroom on how you see students helping.

At this point, you can end the lesson, or go on and talk about a specific student who has areas that are still locked up. Discuss with your class specific ways they can come alongside the student.
Pink and green puzzle pieces line the elementary wing at Central Wisconsin Christian, a K–12 All Belong Member School in Waupun, WI. At the beginning of the school year, educational services coordinator, Becky Vander Werff, and school counselor, Rhonda Schouten, led each classroom in an activity about inclusive community. Using a pink and green puzzle piece, each student depicted their strengths (green area) and struggles (pink area) with words or images. Becky and Rhonda shared with each class that when we put the puzzle pieces together, it creates God’s “Giant Puzzle”, the body of Christ.

“We conducted the puzzle piece activity at the beginning of the year because we wanted to start the year with an inclusive mindset among teachers and kids,” shared Becky.

Displayed on the wall, the puzzle pieces visually remind students (and adults!) that each person—regardless of their ability—has gifts and areas of need. In the body of Christ, one person’s gift can help another person with their struggle.

“During the activity, kids were very honest about their strengths and weaknesses,” said Becky. “As an inclusive school, we want kids who struggle to know that everyone has struggles.” There are no all-green or all-pink people!

Continued on next page
“Inclusive education at CWC is a benefit to all students, not just those with higher needs,” said principal Mark Buteyn. “We are more complete, more empathetic, and more accurately resemble the body of Christ when we are able to serve more diverse learners.”

Teaching and discipling the body of Christ—which includes kids with varied abilities—is central to the school’s mission. The pink and green artwork, displayed prominently in the hallway, daily reminds students, staff, and visitors that each person belongs in the body of Christ at CWC.

Do you have a story to share?

We'd love to hear how you are building belonging at your school! Email Kelly Grant, communications specialist, with your stories and examples at kgrant@allbelong.org.

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