THE BELONGING DRIVERS RANKING ACTIVITY

A quick, meaningful reflection for educators

What do we mean by belonging?

Belonging is a lived experience that develops in the context of relationships. It is reflected in feeling accepted, recognised and valued, and knowing you have a rightful place within a community. For children and adults, belonging is strengthened when the environment offers safety, respect and inclusion, and when people are supported to participate in ways that affirm who they are. This is why the Belonging Drivers activity begins with educator perspectives—because the conditions that help adults feel safe, seen and respected are the same conditions children rely on to engage, learn and thrive.

Why this activity?

Belonging is not one-size-fits-all.

What makes you feel safe, valued, and able to be yourself may be completely different from what lands for someone else.

The same is true for the children in your care.

This activity helps your team explore how different people prioritise different aspects of belonging — and why that matters deeply in early childhood settings.

Understanding these differences helps educators make daily choices that “land” for each child, instead of assuming every child needs the same thing.

Why This Matters for Children

We sometimes forget: children crave belonging for the same reasons we do.

The same drivers you will rank — fairness, being heard, predictability, empathy, safety to express ourselves — shape how children learn, relate, and participate.

When educators understand the differences in what makes adults feel safe and valued, it becomes easier to see the same differences in children.

Belonging isn’t a universal formula. It’s a personalised experience.

And when we get it right, children don’t just join in — they thrive, contribute, and grow in confidence.

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01 Step One

Print & Cut the 10 Belonging Driver Cards

02 Step Two

Rank the Cards (Individually)

Ask each educator to rank the ten cards from most important to least important for their own sense of belonging.
No right answers. No discussion yet. Just instinct.

03 Step Three

Compare & Notice

In pairs/small groups, educators compare their top 3 and bottom 3.
Prompts you provide:

- What surprised you?
- Did anyone value something you never considered?
- What shaped your choices? (culture, identity, upbringing, past workplaces, personality, safety needs)

This is where the magic happens — differences surface instantly.

04 Step Four

Apply It to Children

Now bring it home:
If we each need different things to feel we belong, then children do too — some depend more on fairness, predictability, acknowledgment, or emotional safety, and this activity helps us notice which needs we naturally support and which might be overlooked.

05 Step Five

Team Wrap-Up

Ask the team: “What’s one small change we can make tomorrow to strengthen belonging?” Write one micro-action on a sticky note, add it to the wall, and revisit in two weeks.

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Feeling invited and included

Being treated with fairness

Having people follow through on commitments

Feeling listened to and taken seriously

Being able to speak up without fear

Seeing empathy and care from others

Being acknowledged or appreciated

Feeling connected to the team

Experiencing honesty and transparency

Being able to be myself without hiding parts of my identity

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EYLF v2.0 Alignment

EYLF v2.0 – **Principles**

Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships

This activity builds educator awareness of the conditions that help people feel safe, respected and able to express themselves, supporting relational pedagogy and emotionally secure environments for children.

Equity, inclusion and high expectations

Reflecting on different belonging needs helps educators recognise and remove barriers so that all children can participate, belong and meet high expectations in ways that align with their strengths and identities.

EYLF v2.0 – **Practices**

Holistic, integrated and interconnected approaches

Belonging is connected to children's social, emotional and relational wellbeing; this activity helps educators consider the whole child when planning and interacting.

Responsiveness to children

Understanding that belonging is experienced differently strengthens educator responsiveness to individual children's cues, preferences and ways of expressing themselves.

Play-based learning and intentionality

Insights from the activity can be embedded into routines, transitions and play experiences through intentional choices that support belonging and participation.

EYLF **Learning Outcomes**

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

When educators recognise diverse belonging needs and adjust practice, children experience greater security, confidence and connection in the learning environment.

National Quality Standard Alignment

Quality Area 5: Relationships with children

Supports educators to build respectful and responsive relationships that promote each child's sense of security and belonging.

Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice

Encourages intentional, reflective curriculum decisions that respond to individual children's wellbeing, participation and belonging.

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