

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS & FINDING SUPPORT

FINDING YOUR PEOPLE

Creating belonging through shared values and repeated connection

RESOURCE 4 • BY MAGGIE LEAROYD



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"Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another, 'What! You too? I thought I was the only one.'" — C. S. Lewis

One of the most common fears people carry is the belief that they do not truly belong.

They may be surrounded by colleagues, neighbours or acquaintances, yet still feel disconnected. They may attend family gatherings while quietly wondering whether anyone really knows them. Others have experienced changes in life—moving home, retirement, relationship breakdown, becoming a parent, illness or bereavement—that have left them feeling as though the communities they once relied upon no longer exist.

Belonging is one of our deepest human needs.

It is not simply about being included. It is about feeling accepted. It is the quiet confidence that we can be ourselves without constantly wondering whether we are saying the right thing, behaving the right way or trying to fit expectations that do not feel authentic.

Many people assume that friendships happen naturally during childhood but become increasingly difficult to develop in adulthood. There is some truth in this. School, college and early employment often place people together every day, creating opportunities for relationships to grow through shared experiences. Adult life can be different. Responsibilities increase, routines become busier and opportunities to meet new people may become less frequent.

This does not mean meaningful friendships become impossible.

It simply means we often have to become more intentional about creating opportunities for connection.

One of the greatest misconceptions about belonging is that we need to find people who are exactly like us.

In reality, healthy relationships are rarely built on identical personalities or shared backgrounds alone. They are more often built on shared values—kindness, respect, curiosity, humour, honesty and compassion. We feel safest with people who allow us to be ourselves rather than expecting us to become someone different.

Finding your people often begins by finding places where authentic conversations are more likely to happen.

This might be through volunteering, joining a walking group, attending a local community event, becoming part of a sports club, participating in a creative class or connecting with others who share similar interests. Sometimes it begins online before gradually developing into real-world friendships. There is no single route towards belonging because each person's life is unique.

It can also be helpful to remember that meaningful relationships are rarely formed overnight.

Friendship develops through repeated moments of connection. A conversation after a weekly class. A familiar face who gradually becomes someone we look forward to seeing. A neighbour we stop to talk with more often. A colleague with whom we begin sharing more than work-related conversations.

These small interactions matter.

Research consistently reminds us that even brief moments of positive social connection can contribute to emotional wellbeing. A smile, a shared joke or a genuine conversation may seem ordinary, yet these

experiences often become the building blocks of deeper relationships over time.

It is equally important to accept that not every attempt at connection will develop into friendship.

Sometimes people are simply at different stages of life. Sometimes personalities do not naturally fit together. Experiencing this is not a reflection of your worth. Healthy relationships cannot be forced. They grow where there is mutual interest, respect and willingness from both people.

Many individuals who experience loneliness begin to withdraw further, believing that isolation protects them from disappointment. While understandable, this can create a cycle where opportunities for connection become increasingly limited. Breaking that cycle often starts with one manageable step rather than a dramatic change.

Perhaps that step is accepting an invitation.

Perhaps it is introducing yourself to someone new.

Perhaps it is returning to a hobby you once enjoyed.

Perhaps it is attending a local group for the first time.

Courage is not the absence of uncertainty.

Sometimes courage is simply showing up.

Belonging is rarely something we discover all at once.

It is something we build through consistency, openness and the willingness to keep reaching out, even when it feels uncomfortable.

Your people may not appear exactly where you expected to find them.

But they are far more likely to be found when you give yourself permission to be present, curious and authentically yourself.

Take a Moment to Reflect

You may wish to consider the following questions:

When do you feel most like yourself?

Which activities or interests bring you joy and could be shared with others?

Is there a community, club or group you have been thinking about joining?

What is one small step you could take this month to increase your opportunities for connection?

Remember, meaningful relationships are rarely built through one significant event. More often, they grow through many small moments of shared experience.

If You'd Like Further Support

If you are hoping to build new friendships or become part of a supportive community, these organisations may help.

Men's Sheds

Men's Sheds provide welcoming community spaces where people build friendships while sharing practical skills, hobbies and conversation.

MenWalkTalk

Organised walks that encourage conversation, connection and improved mental wellbeing in a relaxed and informal setting.

ANDYSMANCLUB

Weekly peer-support groups where men can meet others, share experiences and discover that they are not alone in what they are facing.

Mind

Many local Mind services run peer-support groups, wellbeing activities and community programmes that provide opportunities to connect with others.

Hub of Hope

Hub of Hope can help you locate community organisations, support groups and wellbeing services available in your local area.

A Closing Reflection

Finding your people is rarely about becoming someone different.

It is about finding places where you no longer feel that you have to pretend.

The strongest communities are not built through perfection.

They are built through ordinary people choosing to welcome one another with kindness, curiosity and acceptance.

Every conversation has the potential to become a connection.

Every connection has the potential to become belonging.

And belonging has the power to remind us that we were never meant to walk through life on our own.