

# MENTAL HEALTH TIDBIT (BETTER INFORMED TOGETHER)

## HOW TO HELP CHILDREN WHO FEEL LIKE THEY DON'T FIT IN

DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/A/DP  
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**It is good for a child's mental health to feel that they fit in at home, at school, and with peers.**

Some children may feel like outsiders. They get the sense that they do not belong, and they may doubt that they ever will. Having that feeling is known as belonging uncertainty.

If you have ever felt uncomfortable dining in a restaurant or shopping in a clothing store that was beyond your comfort zone, you have experienced belonging uncertainty.

### **Effects of Belonging Uncertainty**

When a child regularly experiences belonging uncertainty, it can have negative effects, including low motivation and poor academic performance. Children who feel that they do not fit in are also more likely to feel isolated and alone, which may lead to anxiety or depression. They may start mistrusting people and expect to experience rejection.

### **Helping Children with Belonging Uncertainty**

When children learn that they are not alone and that most people have the same doubting thoughts, they are more likely to become engaged in their new environment. This reassurance helps to boost feelings of belonging, which should benefit their mental health.

### **Parents can help children overcome their doubts about fitting in.**

- Talk openly about feelings of uncertainty. If your child experiences belonging uncertainty, they may feel incredibly alone. They often assume that they are the only one who feels that way. Let your child know that it is common to question whether they fit in. Sharing that most of their peers are having the same thoughts may help your child feel less isolated and disconnected.
- Promote experiences that foster belonging. Your child may feel a sense of belonging uncertainty at school, but they may feel very connected to peers when playing soccer, going to chess tournaments, or attending cultural events. Look for situations where your child feels like they belong and find ways to have them spend more time in those situations to promote a stronger sense of belonging.

### **When to Seek Help**

If you have talked with your child and it has been several weeks that they have felt isolated or left out in a club, sport, or classroom, you may want to take more action. Start by talking with your child's teacher or school counselor. If the problems persist, you may want to seek help from a mental health professional.

Remember, it is common for children (and adults) to feel like they do not belong sometimes. You can help the children in your life by reminding them that everyone struggles with feeling on the outside sometimes. We have advice on how to help kids develop a sense of belonging.

Excerpts taken from: [Helping Children Who Feel Like They Don't Fit In - On Our Sleeves](#)