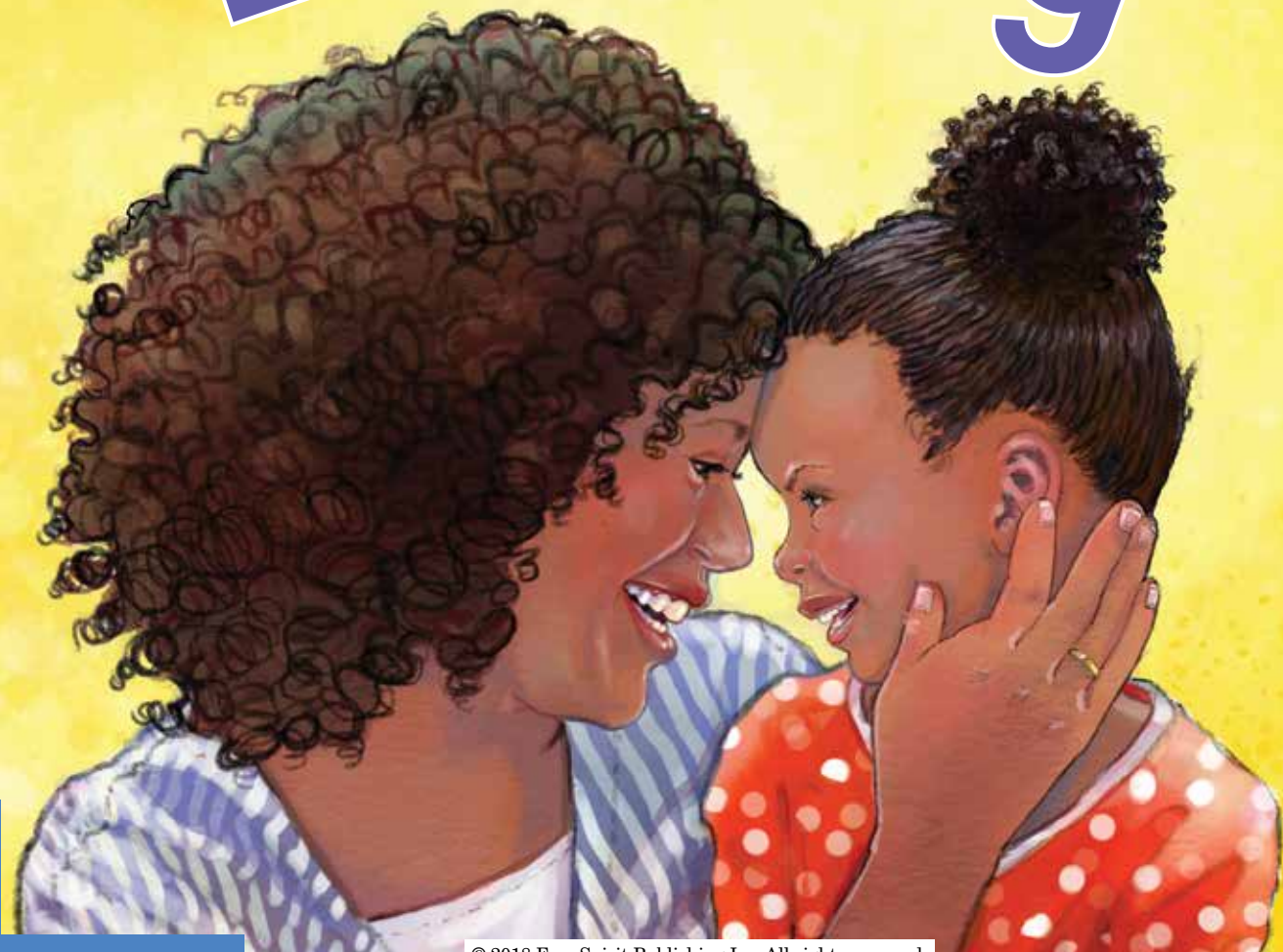


# I Belong



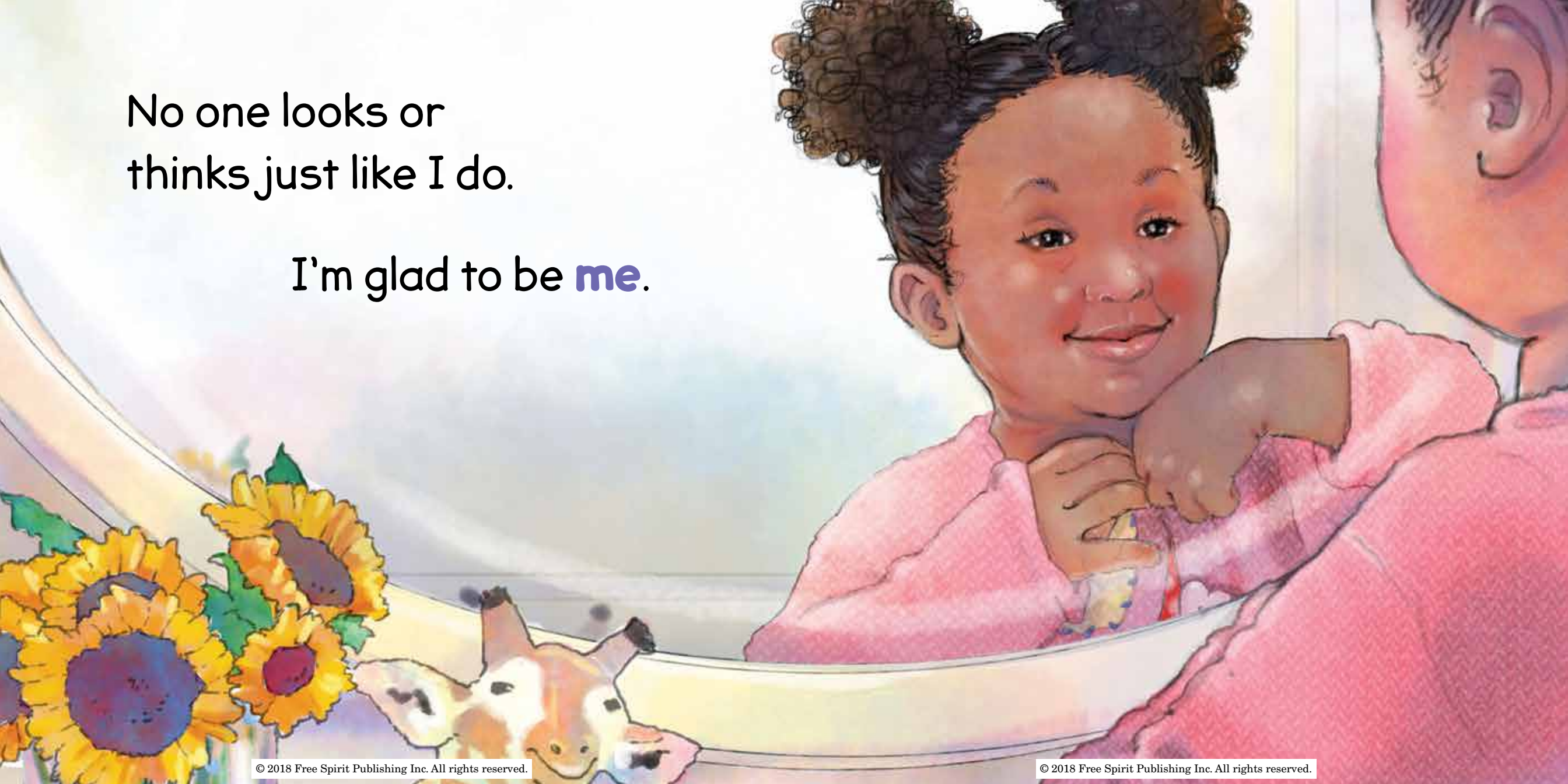
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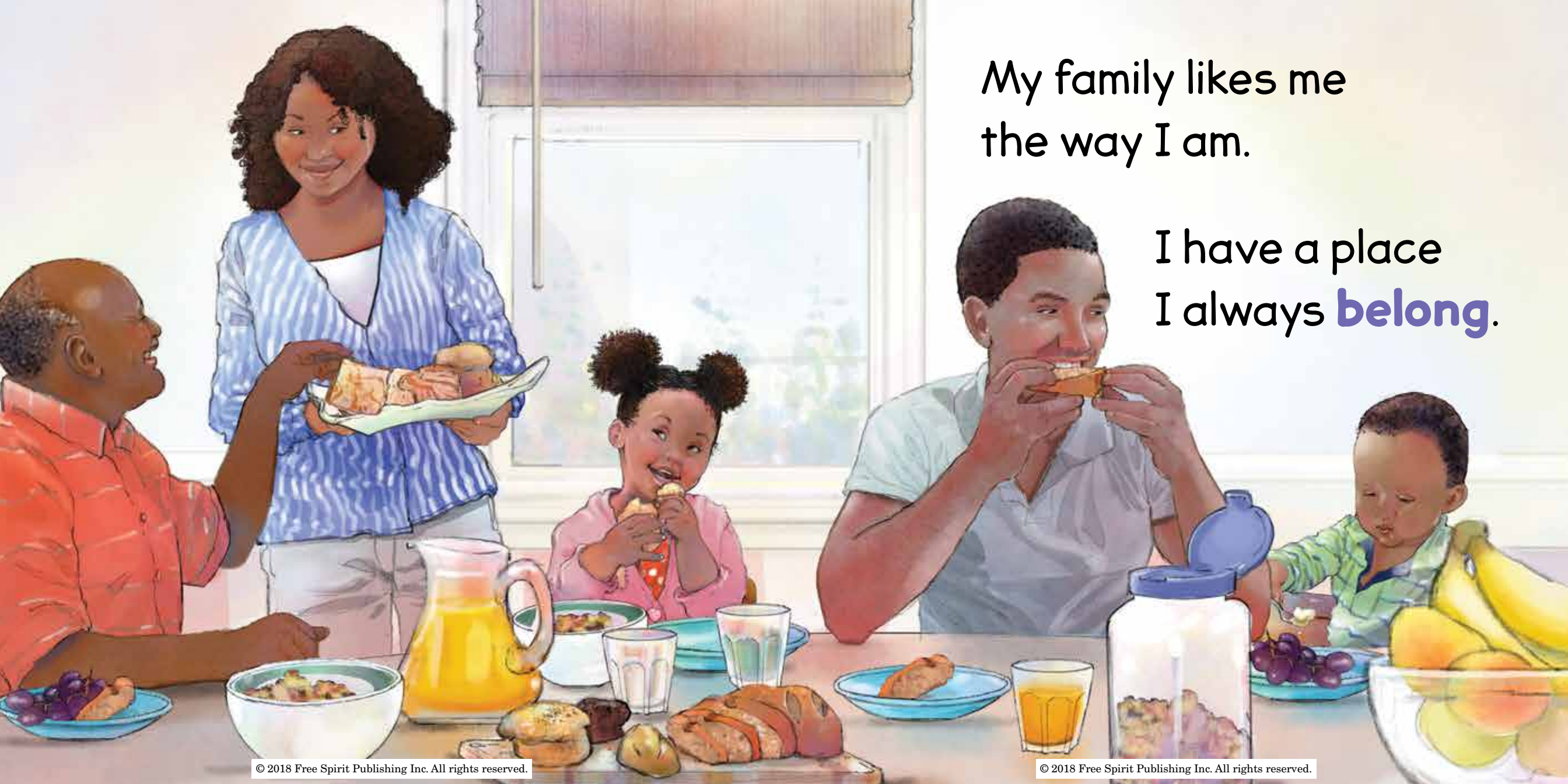
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Cheri J. Meiners, M.Ed. • Illustrated by Penny Weber

No one looks or  
thinks just like I do.

I'm glad to be **me**.





My family likes me  
the way I am.

I have a place  
I always **belong**.

## Activities to Build a Sense of Belonging

Young children need nurturing, protection, and love. Having a safe place to belong is a basic human need. When children feel accepted and enjoy secure relationships, they have a strong foundation for learning and socializing. As healthy development continues, children learn to connect with others by communicating, playing with peers, and being kind to those around them. With a sense of belonging, children are also more likely to be aware of and sensitive to others, and to find ways to include them. From a child’s perspective, belonging means:

1. I have a place I belong (at home and in a group). I feel loved and accepted.
2. I have something to do. I can participate and work together with others.
3. I have someone to help. I can accept others, do kind things, and help them feel included.

**A Part to Play.** Listen to an instrumental song and talk about how music is made of many instruments and parts. What would it sound like without the drums? What if the big horn didn’t play its part? Discuss ways that children can play a part in the routine of the day and how each child is important to the group. Give children instruments and invite them to play along with the song you played earlier.

**“I Fit In!” Puzzle.** Sitting together near a puzzle, give each child or family member a piece of the puzzle. One by one, point out something unique and encouraging about each individual as part of your group, and help children find the spot where the child’s piece “fits in” to the puzzle. When complete, talk about how it feels to see the puzzle all put together. Tell how you feel about having each person as part of the group and how important each person is (how each person “fits in”). Invite children’s ideas about each person’s important part in the group, too. Talk about ways you can help each other feel that you all belong.



**Let’s Connect!** With some connecting toys in hand, show children how different toys connect together. You might say: “This fits here, and this fits here. That’s how these two parts join together—how they connect.” Talk about what it means when people connect. Ask questions like, “What are ways you connect (or do things together) with your friends?” In groups of two or three, have children work together to connect pieces of the toys together. Groups might also work a puzzle, play with a toy, build with blocks, or do a game together. Let them know that these small groups are places where they belong.

**“We Belong Together” Picture.** Look at crayons together. Discuss how every crayon is a little different in color, and every person is a little different in the way the person looks, thinks, dresses, and acts. Each of us is unique and plays a unique role in the group. Assist children to make a collective poster for which each child uses one distinct crayon. Admire the picture with all the colors together. What would it be like if everyone’s part wasn’t in it? Relate that to the class or family and how each person belongs, participates, and contributes something important to the group.

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