

A Strong Child A Sense of Belonging

Focuses on

→ Acquiring social confidence and competence

Including:

- Being able to snuggle in
- Enjoying being with familiar and trusted others
- Valuing individuality and contributions of self and others
- Having a role and identity within a group



“The feeling of belonging... contributes to inner well-being, security and identity. Children need to know that they are accepted for who they are. They should know that what they do can make a difference and that they can explore and try out new activities.”

New Zealand Ministry of Education (1996)

SureStart

Development matters



‘Snuggling in’ gives young babies physical, psychological and emotional comfort.



To sustain healthy emotional attachments babies need familiar, trusting, safe and secure relationships.



Young children's developing attitudes and beliefs are shaped by the value that others place on individual differences and similarities.



The development of a strong sense of identity both individually and within a group helps children feel they belong.

Effective practice

- Recognise that young babies will find comfort from ‘snuggling in’ with a variety of objects and people in different places, such as cosy corners with soft, inviting surfaces.
- At times of transition (such as the beginning or end of the day or change of shifts) greet and say goodbye to babies and their parents. This helps to develop secure and trusting three-way relationships.
- Find ways to value and celebrate each young child within the group by making routines such as feeding and changing personal.
- Encourage all children to participate in and contribute in a group, being mindful that some will find this more difficult than others.

A Sense of Belonging

Look, listen, note

- Note when you provide opportunities for young babies to ‘snuggle in’. Is it only when you have time or is it in response to their needs?
- Note the ways you nurture babies’ sense of themselves whilst also helping them feel they belong to the group.
- Note young children’s questions about differences; e.g. skin colour, hair, friends
- Observe the strategies children use to join in or avoid a group during play.

Play and practical support

- Talk to parents about significant events in the young baby's day. Ask them about important events at home and encourage them to contribute to their baby's records.
- Provide experiences that involve using all the senses, such as relaxing music, soft lighting and pleasant smells for babies to enjoy.
- Create opportunities for young children to be involved in the domestic routines that link home and the out of home setting, being mindful of ways in which these may differ culturally.
- Provide a soft toy for children to take home in turn. It could have an overnight bag with a note to parents encouraging them, with their child, to care for it and return it safely.



Planning and resourcing

- Plan for all staff to have frequent information-sharing opportunities so that all have some knowledge of each child. This creates a close community spirit.
- Provide each child with their own place in which to keep their own things. This nurtures a sense of belonging.
- Provide an area to display pictures of children's families, pets and homes and any pictures they have brought from home.
- Plan for key people to be with babies and children to create opportunities for 'snuggling in'.

Meeting diverse needs

- Try to find ways of making all children feel valued by, for instance, celebrating their own cultures, achievements or significant events in their lives.
- Giving children the chance to explore and talk about physical characteristics, things they like to do or eat, are important aspects of self-identity and help children learn about each other.
- The recognition of the significance of each child's race, culture, ability and gender comes from the respect for, and value of, difference. Don't be afraid to discuss different physical characteristics, as well as individual preferences, as these are important aspects of self-identity and inform children about others.

Challenges and dilemmas

- Consider how to reinforce children's sense of individuality whilst also nurturing a sense of group belonging; e.g. by giving each child a place for their special things.
- Finding ways to support children when their closest friend leaves your setting; e.g. by talking about what their friend might be doing now.
- How to help children from a family, whose first language is not English, gain a sense of belonging within what might seem a strange and unfamiliar context; e.g. by learning how to say 'hello' in the child's home language.
- Encouraging a child who often remains on the edge of a group to feel that he or she belongs; e.g. by playing alongside them with other children.



In this example, bringing their own flannel from home and keeping it in their own special place helps these babies to share a sense of belonging.