

Belonging Starts Here: How We Build Stronger Youths Through Connection



By Joan A. John-Cumbermack | Outlier Consulting Services Ltd | 2025 June

Hey there! Did you know that in every corner of the world, there's a young person quietly asking themselves: *"Where do I belong?"*

For many of our youths today, belonging feels out of reach. It's not that there's no love around them - it's that connection often gets lost in the noise of expectations, pressures, and digital distraction. And for some, the only place that feels safe or affirming is a screen: a gaming community, a curated Instagram feed, or a late-night scroll on TikTok. A place where you become friends with an Avatar, not a real person.

But screens, as comforting as they might seem, can't replace what we all truly need: to be seen, heard, and accepted for who we are—offline and in real life.



Each heart has pain, only the expression is different. Some hide it in their eyes or hide it behind their smile.

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The Hidden Struggles Behind the Smiles

I work with many young people, and here's what I've noticed: the ones who laugh the loudest in public often carry the heaviest questions in private. Am I good enough? Am I disappointing someone? Will I ever be accepted for 'just being me'?

They're not just navigating school—they're navigating identity, belonging, mental health, peer pressure, and the sometimes-overwhelming expectations of family, friends, and teachers. And often, they're doing it alone, or at least that is how it feels to them.



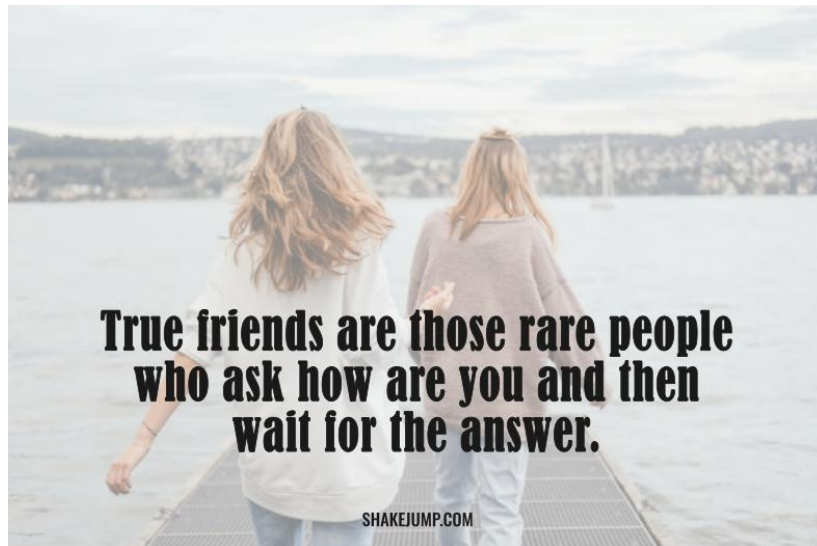
So, Where Do We Begin?

Connection begins with presence. It begins with listening without fixing, noticing without judging, showing up consistently, not necessarily perfectly. So, here's my little piece of insight on this:

For adults, whether you're a parent, auntie, uncle, teacher, coach, or neighbour, you are already a major part of a young person's village. You don't have to say all the right things. Just ask, "*How are you—really?*" Or even asking them to share with you anything interesting that has happened recently. And just be there to hear the answer.

For parents, sometimes your child doesn't need advice. They need your calm, your hug, your unspoken assurance that no matter what, they are enough. My sons have, on occasion, cautioned me that not every moment is a "*coachable moment*." Sometimes, they just want to be in my presence.

For youths, you are not alone. You may feel disconnected, misunderstood, or unsure of who you are right now. But you are not broken. You are Becoming! And the journey of becoming is at times messy and scary, but sacred and worthwhile.



**True friends are those rare people
who ask how are you and then
wait for the answer.**

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Let's Normalize Realness.

Let's make vulnerability normal. Let's normalize not knowing. Let's celebrate the awkward attempts to connect, the brave texts that say: "*I need help,*" and the quiet resilience of showing up each day even when it feels hard.

Because here's the truth: our youth don't need perfect adults. They need present ones. And they don't need the illusion of flawless peers—they need real friends. Realness builds belonging.

I wish to call on all of you during the upcoming summer break – Let's Build Belonging Together

To the Youth: You don't have to have it all figured out. But you do have a voice, and it matters. Be open to growth, ask for help, and let your real self be seen. Belonging starts with showing up—even when it's scary.

To the Parents: Create space. Not just for conversations, but for emotions, for exploration, for questions that don't always have answers. Your consistent presence may be the anchor your child is silently craving.

To the Adults: in Every Community: You don't need a title to make a difference. Every small act of care—every smile, every genuine "*Hey, how're you doing?*" plants seeds of trust and hope. Be the person you needed when you were younger.

Let's All Be A Part Of The Change!

At Outlier Consulting Services Ltd, we help young people—and those who care for them—navigate life with clarity, confidence, and emotional strength. Let's grow a generation of youths *"who belong."*

Reach out. Share this. Start a conversation. Let's build community, one life at a time.



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your next breakthrough.

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About Me:

Joan A. John-Cumbermack is a Certified Breakthrough Coach who turns potential into progress. She helps people shatter limits, embrace change, and create the life they've been reaching for. Backed by years in coaching and human resource development, Joan brings sharp insights, proven tools, and a belief that *"As long as you have life, you have an opportunity to make a difference."*