



## REMEMBER

- Community is defined as the place where I am known by name and missed if I am gone. We are made in the image of a God who is himself community; a desire to belong begins deep within us.
- Many people know about God, but don't feel known by God in a personal and intimate way. Exploring God within community opens up the emotional right brain and not just the logical left brain. This opens up the door for young people to experience God not just learn about him.
- Connecting to other humans is a great foundation but it's not enough. We were made to connect horizontally and vertically. If a young person's connections are only human it will cause them to put too much reliance on others for roles that God was meant to fill.
- God invites us into belonging with Him. "I have called you by name and you are mine" (Is 43:1). There is power and healing when we experience that truth.



## RECOGNIZE

- Today's teens and young adults are known to be the loneliest generation on the planet. One third say they have few people they could turn to in times of trouble or even just to talk.
- According to teens, the feeling of belonging comes because of a "who" not a "where". It's not about involvement with a program or activity. Participation is not the same as belonging.
- A sense of belonging to a group comes out of an individual relationship with a trusted adult within that community. As an adult, showing up to an event doesn't create belonging for teens. Intentional care at that event does.
- A relationship with you is good but according to research, when a teen has 5 or more supportive relationships they have an exponentially higher chance of thriving.



## RESPOND

According to Springtide Research Belongingness Process, belonging deepens through an identifiable process. Here's how it happens:

### I am noticed.

- This initial step happens in straightforward and practical ways: acknowledge them when they walk in the room, remember things they've said, recognize things they have changed, take interest in what interests them.
- Pay attention by asking yourself: What am I seeing? What am I hearing? What am I recognizing?
- Noticing is the unspoken invitation into relationship.

### I am named.

- Do the work of learning and memorizing names and pronunciations to say "you matter to me". Write new names down on your phone so you can pray for and remember them.
- Consider using their preferred pronoun as an act of hospitality, inviting a teen into belonging just as they are.

- Go beyond their name and learn what is distinctive about each youth. What makes them different than every other person who has that name? What traits, likes, values or interests do you share? What do they know about that you don't? What gifts do you see?
- Let them know that they aren't just a face in the crowd. You look forward to seeing them and miss them when they are gone.

### I am known.

- Ask welcoming and curious questions and listen intently to their answers, reflecting back what they've said to be sure you're hearing what they mean. This says, "I want to know you beneath the surface and I'm willing to work for it."
- Remember important things that they have told you and check back on them over time.
- Create a sense of safety around failure. Let them know that sharing their mistakes, poor choices or opinions/beliefs can happen without fear that you'll walk away. They don't need to play a role when they are with you.
- Watch for things that give you hints of what is good and Godly in them - and tell them what you see. Ask God to give you his picture of this teen and encourage them when you see evidence of this developing.



## RESOURCES

**Belonging: Reconnecting America's Loneliest Generation** - A report based on recent research from Springtide Research on the impact of belonging.

**Belong** - A podcast featuring the thoughts of teens around why belonging and relationships with adults matter to them.