

**Future Ready Pathways for
School, Work and Life**

Building Better Connections

Healthy Relationships & Empathy

*Lessons for lower elementary
students, aged 5-8*

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*Lessons for lower elementary students
aged 5-8*

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Teacher/Parent Guide

Building Better Connections

Learning Objectives

This workbook is designed to support kindergarten through 2nd grade students in developing the foundational skills needed to build healthy, respectful, and inclusive relationships.

By the end of these lessons, students will be able to:

1. Recognize and name their own feelings and understand that emotions influence choices and behavior.
2. Notice, respect, and care about the feelings of others, developing early empathy and perspective-taking.
3. Understand that everyone belongs, even when people think, feel, or act differently.
4. Practice inclusion through thoughtful choices, such as inviting others, sharing space, and using kind words.
5. Understand and respect personal boundaries, including body space, belongings, and emotional comfort.
6. Make independent, respectful choices in peer situations, even when friends want something different.
7. Use calm communication and problem-solving strategies to resolve conflicts fairly.
8. Repair relationships after harm, learning how to apologize, make amends, and rebuild trust.

These objectives support students in developing empathy, communication skills, and responsible decision-making in ways that are concrete, relatable, and appropriate for early elementary learners.

Teacher/Parent Guide

Building Better Connections

Learning Rationale

The early elementary years are a critical time for children to learn how relationships work and to develop a strong sense of belonging. At this age, children are learning how to recognize emotions, navigate friendships, manage disagreements, and understand how their actions affect others.

Without intentional instruction, young learners may struggle with:

- Understanding different perspectives
- Respecting personal boundaries
- Handling peer influence
- Resolving conflicts calmly
- Repairing relationships after mistakes

Building Better Connections provides clear, age-appropriate guidance that helps children make sense of their social world. The workbook emphasizes that:



Everyone has feelings, and those feelings matter



Everyone deserves to feel included and respected



Boundaries help relationships feel safe and caring



Choices can be thoughtful, even in challenging situations



Conflicts are a normal part of relationships and can be solved peacefully



Mistakes do not end relationships — they can be repaired

An Introduction for Teachers & Parents

Introduction for the Teacher/Parent

These lessons are designed for lower elementary students (ages 5–8) and can be used in classrooms, homeschool settings, or small learning groups. Each lesson includes a short, guided reading section for an adult to introduce the concept, followed by hands-on activities that help children practice building healthy, inclusive relationships in age-appropriate ways.

The lessons are:

- **Flexible** – Each lesson includes multiple activities so you can choose the ones that best meet the needs of your learners. Optional discussion prompts, drawing activities, and simple role-play scenarios allow lessons to be used as stand-alone activities or as part of a consistent weekly routine.
- **Engaging** – Lessons use a variety of activity types—such as sorting tasks, picture-based scenarios, drawing prompts, simple role-play, and real-life examples—to keep children interested and help the concepts feel meaningful. These varied formats support different learning styles and encourage active participation.
- **Practical** – The skills children practice—such as including others, understanding feelings, respecting personal space, using words during disagreements, and making things right after a mistake—can be applied immediately at school and at home. These are everyday skills that support positive friendships and a strong sense of belonging.



You do not need to be an expert in teaching social or relationship skills to use this pack. Simply read the sections labeled **“A teacher, parent, or older sibling should read this”** aloud, guide the conversation, and support children as they complete each activity. The icon in the margin will show you exactly what to read out loud.

The goal of Building Better Connections is to help children develop the foundational skills needed for healthy relationships—making friends, including others, understanding different perspectives, handling misunderstandings, and repairing harm. By practicing these skills early, children learn that relationships are built through care, communication, and kindness, helping them feel more confident, connected, and capable in their everyday interactions.



An Introduction for Teachers & Parents

Table of Contents

Pre-Assessment – A simple check-in to understand how students currently recognize feelings, include others, respect personal space, and respond to peer challenges such as disagreements or mistakes.

Lesson 1: Everyone Belongs – Building the foundation for healthy relationships by learning to recognize feelings in ourselves and others, practice empathy, and understand that everyone deserves to feel included and valued.

Lesson 2: My Space & My Choice – Learning about personal boundaries by understanding body space, belongings, and comfort levels, and practicing how to ask for permission, say no, and respect others' choices.

Lesson 3: Making Friendship Choice – Exploring how friends influence our choices and practicing how to make kind, respectful decisions, even when others want something different.

Lesson 4: Solving Problems Without Hurting – Learning age-appropriate ways to handle conflicts and misunderstandings by calming down, listening, using words, and working together to find fair solutions.

Lesson 5: Fixing Mistakes and Healing Feelings – Understanding how to repair relationships after mistakes by offering meaningful apologies, making things right, and rebuilding trust with care.

Post-Assessment – Reflecting on what students have learned and how their relationship skills have grown, including how they can use these skills to build positive connections at school and at home.

Resources – Additional ideas and supports for teachers, parents, and students.



Universal Design for Learning

Overview

This workbook is designed using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to ensure that all children—with different strengths, needs, learning styles, and backgrounds—can access, engage with, and benefit from the lessons.

UDL recognizes that children learn in different ways. Some learn best by talking, others by drawing or moving, and others by watching and listening. This pack intentionally offers multiple ways to engage, express understanding, and access content, allowing adults to adapt lessons without changing the learning goals.

Multiple Means of Engagement

(How students stay interested and motivated)

- Lessons include a variety of activity types such as sorting, matching, drawing, role-play, movement, and discussion to keep students engaged.
- Students are given choice whenever possible (which activity to complete, how to respond, or which scenario to act out).
- Activities are short and flexible, allowing adults to adjust pacing based on attention, energy level, or emotional readiness.
- Content is grounded in real-life situations children recognize, making learning meaningful and relevant.

Adult Tip: If a child seems disengaged, try switching the response mode (drawing instead of writing, acting instead of talking) rather than repeating the same activity.

Multiple Means of Representation

(How information is presented and understood)

- Key ideas are presented using simple language, visuals, icons, and examples.
- Anchor books introduce concepts through stories before abstract discussion.
- Repeated routines and sentence frames support understanding and predictability.
- Concepts are revisited across lessons to support memory and comprehension.

Adult Tip: Re-read instructions aloud, point to visuals as you explain, and model one example before asking children to try on their own.

Universal Design for Learning

Multiple Means of Action and Expression

(How students show what they know)

- Students can respond by:
 - drawing
 - coloring
 - matching
 - pointing
 - acting
 - speaking
 - dictating responses to an adult
- Writing is never required to demonstrate understanding.
- Role-play and hands-on activities allow children to practice skills in low-pressure ways.

Adult Tip: Accept responses in many forms. Focus on the idea a child is expressing, not the format.

Flexible Use Across Settings

This pack is designed to work in:

- classrooms
- homeschool environments
- counseling or small-group settings
- one-on-one adult-child work

Activities can be:

- used as written
- shortened
- combined
- revisited multiple times

There is no required order for activities within a lesson.

Emotional Safety and Developmental Support

- Lessons avoid shame, punishment, or labeling behavior as “bad.”
- Mistakes are framed as part of learning and growth.
- Students are never required to share personal experiences.
- Adults are encouraged to observe and listen rather than correct or judge responses.

Adult Tip: If a topic feels sensitive, allow children to respond using story characters or pictures instead of personal examples.



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Universal Design for Learning

Supporting Diverse Learners

This workbook supports:

- emerging readers and writers
- multilingual learners
- neurodivergent learners
- students with varying emotional regulation skills

Differentiation strategies include:

- sentence starters
- visual supports
- movement-based options
- partner or group work
- adult modeling

Final Note for Adults

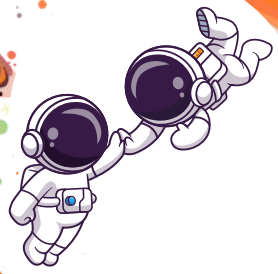
You do not need to be an expert in social or relationship skills to use this pack. Your role is to:

- read aloud
- guide gently
- listen carefully
- model calm, respectful behavior

The goal is not perfection, but practice. With support and flexibility, every child can build the skills needed for healthy relationships.



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Pre-Assessment



Lesson Plan: Pre-Assessment

Learning Objectives

By the end of the pre-assessment activity, students will:

1. Share what they already know about friendships, kindness, and including others.
2. Express how they notice and talk about their own feelings and the feelings of others.
3. Show how they usually respond when problems, disagreements, or hurt feelings happen.
4. Communicate the strategies they currently use to solve problems with peers or make things right after a mistake.
5. Begin thinking about relationships as skills that can grow and improve over time..

Learning Rationale

The pre-assessment helps teachers and parents gain insight into how students currently interact with others and navigate everyday social situations. Young children bring a wide range of experiences, skills, and comfort levels when it comes to friendships, emotions, and conflict. These differences shape how they participate in group settings and relate to peers.

This pre-assessment is not a test. Instead, it is an opportunity to observe, listen, and begin meaningful conversations about how children understand relationships. Through simple prompts and activities, adults can better understand how children think about feelings, inclusion, boundaries, and problem-solving.

By exploring what students already know and do, adults can:

- Meet children where they are by building on existing strengths and gently supporting areas that are still developing.
- Notice patterns or challenges—such as difficulty expressing feelings with words, avoiding conflict, or not knowing how to repair a mistake.
- Establish a baseline for growth in empathy, communication, and problem-solving across the lessons.
- Encourage self-awareness by helping children recognize the skills they already use and the ones they will continue to practice.
- Create a supportive learning environment that normalizes mistakes and emphasizes growth, understanding, and repair in relationships.

Lesson Plan: Pre-Assessment

Step 1: Introduce the Activity

- “Today we’re going to think about how we make friends, include others, understand feelings, and handle problems with other people. Everyone is still learning these skills, and we all get better with practice. There are no right or wrong answers — we just want to see what you already know and do.”
- Show the response icons (😊 happy face, 🤔 thinking face, 😞 confused/upset face).
- Explain: “When I read a statement, point to or circle the face that shows how well you understand or do this in your everyday work.”

Step 2: Read Statements Aloud

Read each statement slowly, pointing to the icons.

Step 3: Clarify the Format

- If working individually: Students can circle or mark the face that matches their answer.
- If working in a group: Students can point to the face they agree with.

Step 4: Optional Discussion

- After each statement, you may ask quick, open-ended questions, such as:
 - “What do you do to be a good friend?”
 - “How do you know how someone else is feeling?”
 - “What do you do when you and a friend don’t agree?”
 - “What helps you calm down when you feel upset?”
 - “How do you make things right after a mistake?”
- Do not correct their answers — just observe and listen. This is not a teaching moment yet; it is for learning about their current skills and habits.

Step 5: Record Insights

- Adults may take notes about student responses, patterns, or areas of uncertainty. This information will serve as a baseline when comparing growth at the end of the unit.

Step 6: Set the Tone

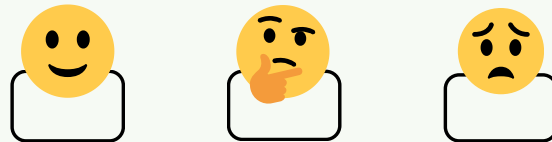
- Reassure students: “You’ll be learning lots of new ways to make friends, understand feelings, solve problems, and make things right.”
- Keep the activity light, positive, and playful. The goal is to build awareness, not judgment.

Pre-Assessment

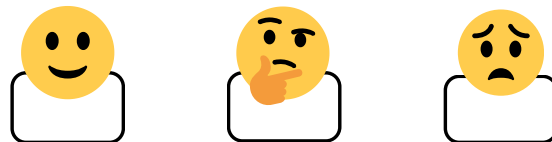
For each statement below, rate how well you understand the idea by choosing one of the following:

- I understand this well 😊
- I am not sure if I understand this 🤔
- I don't understand this well 😞

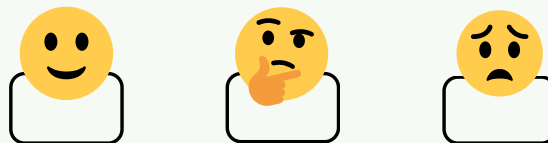
I know what it means to be kind to others.



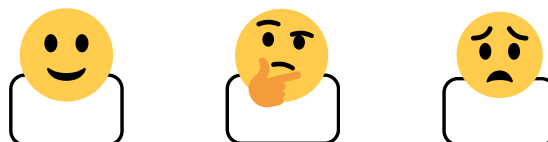
I can tell how I am feeling most of the time.



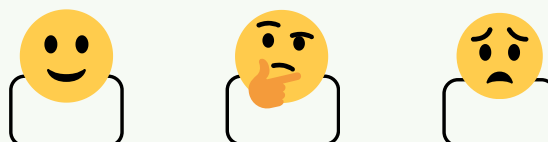
I can notice how someone else might be feeling.



I know ways to help others feel included.

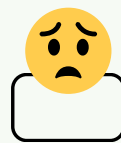
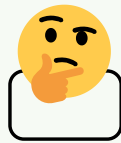


I understand that everyone belongs, even if we are different.

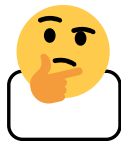


Pre-Assessment

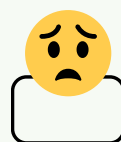
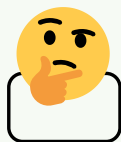
I know that my body and space belong to me.



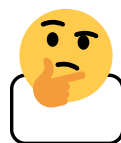
I know how to respect other people's body space.



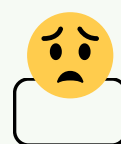
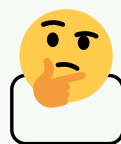
I can make my own choices, even when friends want something different.



I know what to do when a problem or disagreement happens.



I can use words to talk about a problem instead of using my body.

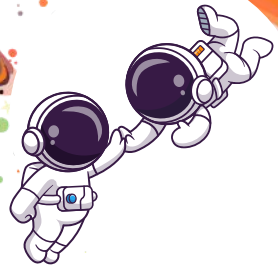


I know how to say sorry when I hurt someone's feelings.





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Lesson 1

Everyone Belongs

Essential Question

How can we help everyone feel like they belong?

Core Idea

Everyone has feelings, and everyone belongs. We help others feel like they belong when we notice feelings, are kind, and include others.



Lesson Plan: Everyone Belongs

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Recognize that everyone has feelings that matter.
2. Practice noticing and naming feelings in themselves and others.
3. Understand that people may feel differently in the same situation.
4. Learn that everyone belongs, even when people are different.
5. Identify simple ways to include others through kind and welcoming actions.

Learning Rationale

A sense of belonging is the foundation of healthy relationships, especially for young children. In the early elementary years, students are forming ideas about who is included, who is left out, and whether they themselves are accepted by peers. These early experiences shape how children interact, communicate, and respond to others throughout the school day.

This lesson intentionally places belonging at the center of relationship learning by helping children understand that:

- Feelings are shared by everyone
- Differences are a normal part of being together
- Inclusion is a choice that can be practiced every day

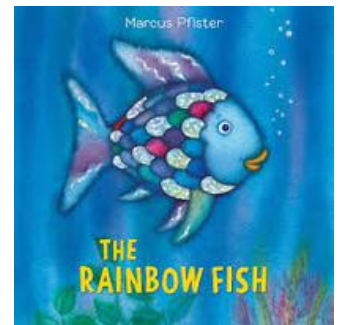
By focusing first on feelings, empathy, and inclusion, this lesson creates a shared understanding that all students are valued members of the group. This foundation supports later lessons on boundaries, decision-making, conflict resolution, and repair, making those skills easier to understand and apply.

Rather than teaching rules for behavior, this lesson helps children build awareness and care for others—key ingredients for creating classrooms and communities where everyone feels safe, respected, and connected.

Lesson Plan: Everyone Belongs

Materials Needed:

- The anchor text: ***The Rainbow Fish* by Marcus Pfister**
 - If you don't have a copy, you can use a free YouTube reading of this book. Here is one example: <https://youtu.be/Z3cmddZh6t8si=Q5MLYlpjYs5yiWFZ>
- Crayons, colored pencils, or markers



Lesson Plan

Read the **Student Lesson** out loud. The lesson will lead you into reading *The Rainbow Fish* with optional questions you can ask before, during, and after you read.

Activity 1: Friendship Scales

- Read the directions to your students.
- Invite students to explain their drawings verbally.
- This is a great opportunity to build confidence and positive identity.
- Display drawings (if appropriate) to reinforce community norms.

Activity 2: Making Room

- Before starting, read the directions.
- This is a teacher-led activity.
- Model each action before students try it.
- Keep it playful and low-pressure.
- Reinforce effort: "I noticed you made space."
- Use this as a transition or regulation break.

Lesson Plan: Everyone Belongs

Lesson Plan Continued...

Activity 3: Feelings Faces Gallery

- Read the directions to your students.
- Accept multiple answers; emphasize noticing clues over being correct.
- Model language such as:
 - “I notice their face looks...”
 - “Their body is showing...”
- Avoid correcting feelings guesses unless they are unsafe or harmful.
- Reinforce the message: Everyone has feelings, and those feelings matter.

Activity 4: Feelings Change

- Read the directions to your students.
- Use *The Rainbow Fish* as a shared example before students begin.
- Reinforce that feelings changing is normal and healthy.
- Invite personal connections, but allow students to use the story instead if they prefer.
- Use language like:
 - “What changed?”
 - “What helped the feeling change?”

Activity 5: Ways to Include Others

- Read the directions to your students.
- Emphasize noticing and effort, not completion.
- Invite brief daily sharing (“Who saw inclusion today?”).
- This works well as a home–school connection.

Everyone Belongs



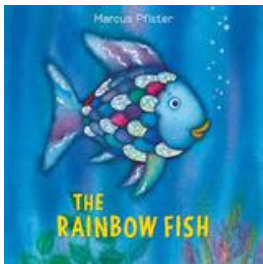
A teacher, parent, or older sibling should read this:

Friendship is about how we treat other people. In healthy friendships, we use kind words and actions to help others feel happy, safe, and included. Being a good friend does not mean being exactly the same as everyone else—it means caring about how others feel and choosing to treat them with respect.

Sometimes friendships feel easy, and sometimes they feel tricky. We may want something very badly, feel unsure about sharing, or wonder how to include others. Learning what helps people feel included can guide us in making choices that bring people closer together.

When we talk about friendship and belonging, we can notice it all around us—on the playground, in the classroom, at home, and in the stories we read together.

Today, we are going to read a story about a fish who learns an important lesson about friendship, feelings, and belonging. As we read, think about the choices the Rainbow Fish makes and how those choices affect others.



A teacher, parent, or older sibling should read *The Rainbow Fish*.

Before Reading.

- Look at the cover. What do you notice about the Rainbow Fish?
- How do you think the Rainbow Fish feels about his shiny scales?
- What do you think helps someone feel included or welcome?

During Reading.

(Choose 2–3 per reading so it stays quick and engaging.)

- How does the Rainbow Fish act toward the other fish at the beginning of the story?
- How do the other fish feel when the Rainbow Fish does not share?
- What advice does the octopus give the Rainbow Fish?
- How do the Rainbow Fish's choices change as the story goes on?
- How can you tell that the Rainbow Fish feels different at the end of the story?

After Reading.

- What choices did the Rainbow Fish make that helped others feel included?
- How did the other fish's feelings change during the story?
- How did the Rainbow Fish feel before he made new choices? How did he feel after?
- What are some ways you can help others feel like they belong at school or at home?
- Why do you think kindness and caring choices help friendships grow?