



## The Child's Need To Belong: Part 1

We all need to feel like we belong. It goes without saying that the most important place we need to feel like we belong is in our families. From our foundational family relationships we build connection within our schools, our churches, our neighborhoods, our communities...and beyond.

According to developmental psychologists Rudolf Dreikurs and Alfred Adler, a child's behavior is directed towards getting the emotional connection of belonging.

To realize this sense of belonging a child's behavior is driven by four basic, yet unconscious, goals:

- Contact
- Power
- Protection
- Withdrawal

### CONTACT

#### When the goal of contact is reached:

**Child:** Feels his contributions are recognized.  
Sees that he belongs by cooperating with others.  
Enjoys social interaction.

**Adult:** Sees a cooperating and contributing child.  
Has a sense of closeness to the child.

#### When the goal of contact **not** reached:

**Child:** Tries to make contact by drawing undue attention to himself.  
Feels he belongs only when he is noticed and someone is



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doing something for him.

Acts as though the world must revolve around him.

Efforts are misdirected.

**Adult:** Feels irritated with the child whose goal for contact is misdirected.

## POWER

### When the goal of power is met:

**Child:** Feels independent.  
Thinks he is able to influence what happens to himself.  
Feels responsible for his life.

**Adult:** Sees a child who feels independent and thinks he is able to influence what happens to himself.  
Admires the independent child's responsible and self-motivated behavior.

### When the goal of power is *not* met:

**Child:** Feels powerless.  
Thinks he belongs only when he is the boss.  
Asserts that you can't boss him around.  
Sees our anger as a successful power play.

**Adult:** Feels angry with the rebellious child.



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### PROTECTION

#### When the goal of protection is met:

- Child:** Is assertive and forgiving.  
Stands up for himself and others, when treated fairly.  
Able to forgive those who have wronged him.
- Adult:** Feels love for the assertive, forgiving child.

#### When the goal of protection is **not** met:

- Child:** Takes revenge.  
Believes he has been hurt.  
Seeks to hurt others to “get even”.
- Adult:** Feels attacked and hurt by the revengeful child.

### WITHDRAWAL

#### When the goal to withdraw is met:

- Child:** Goes off to be alone in order to calm himself and think through a situation.  
Realizes that it is okay to need to be alone.  
Respects others’ need to be alone.  
Makes contact again when he is ready.
- Adult:** Feels respect for the child’s self-awareness of meeting his personal needs.

#### When the goal to withdraw not met (misdirected):

- Child:** Avoids interaction.  
Feels that he is a failure at everything.



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Becomes passive.

Refuses to try.

Gives up trying to make contact, develop personal power, or feel safe and protected.

**Adult:** Feels helpless interacting with the avoiding child.  
Has no idea how to help.

**To help our children feel like they belong,  
we need to help them achieve their unconscious goals of  
contact, power, protection and withdrawal.**

### **To help a child meet the goal of contact:**

We encourage cooperation and acknowledge the child's contributions.

### **To help with power and independence:**

We give our children growing responsibility, along with the corresponding freedom, and continue to encourage their efforts.

### **To help with a sense of protection** (seen as assertiveness and forgiveness):

We express our own positive feelings. We forgive others. We assert our own right to be treated with fairness.

### **To support the goal of withdrawing:**

For the child needing to re-center and calm himself, we respect the child's wishes to be alone and use listening techniques when he is ready to talk to



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us.

**You can help your child feel like he or she belongs** by understanding that demands for undue attention, rebellion, revenge and avoidance are the discouraged and misdirected results of trying to make contact, to create personal power, to provide self-protection, or to withdraw in order to try again.

**When a child feels a sense of belonging**, when the four unconscious goals of contact, personal power, self-protection and withdrawing are met, and not misdirected...

*We see a child who is happy, cooperative, self-motivated, assertive and self-aware.*

### **Time to put this into action!**

#### **How are you going to help a child...**

- Make positive contact with others?
- Create personal power?
- Provide self-protection?
- Withdraw in order think through a situation?

For more *put-it-into-action* ideas, head on over to <http://MarenSchmidt.com> where you have lots of resources available as a Kids Talk Reader.

#### **Resources:**

Adler, Alfred. *The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler*. Harper Torch Books (1964)

Dreikurs, Rudolf. *Children: The Challenge*. Plume Publications (1964)



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Popkin, Michael. *Active Parenting Handbook*. Active Parenting, Inc. (1983)