

Blessed Are the Includers

My son, Johnathan, had a bad day at preschool the other day. I didn't realise how bad, however, until I tried to drop him off the next morning and he panicked. I leaned in to see what was wrong, and he gripped my neck with a death hug, buried his head in my shoulder, and refused to let go.

This wasn't like him. He had never complained before when I dropped him off, and he had never seemed to care when I left. In fact, he loves school. Just a couple of weeks earlier, when we were touring the place, he nearly cried when his mother and I made him leave. Yet, here he was, clinging to my neck for dear life, terrified I would go without him.

So why was he scared? The day before, a couple of kids had refused to play with him. That's it. They hadn't threatened him, laughed at him, or bullied him. They'd simply excluded him. I hadn't thought much of it when he told me the previous night. After all, that's what kids do, right? It didn't seem like a big deal. Yet, here I was late for work, hugging my boy for dear life, and terrified because I knew I had to leave him.

I'm not sure why I was surprised by his reaction. Our need to be included is fundamental to our humanity. It isn't secondary or nice to have. It's hard core—right up there with our need for oxygen, food, and morning coffee. Okay, the last one might just be me. But the rest are common to all people.

It reminded me of the incident between Taylor Swift and Kanye West at the MTV VMA awards last year. Taylor, a 17-year-old country music star, was accepting an award for best female video. She had just started to explain how much it meant to her to be accepted by

'mainstream' music, when rap star Kanye West took the microphone from her. He then explained that she really didn't belong there after all. Actually, he said that Beyonce deserved the award, but I'm sure Taylor and the rest of America heard: 'You're not in the same league as Beyonce.

You don't belong'. Understandably, Taylor broke down and was seen crying with her mother backstage.

Fortunately, the story didn't end there. Beyonce received another award later in the evening, and she took the opportunity to tell everyone how much she related to Taylor. Beyonce explained that she'd been a teen when she received her first VMA, and she remembered what it was like. She then invited Taylor back onstage to have her moment. Her message to Taylor was clear: 'You do belong. You're one of us. You're included'.

My son, Johnathan, had a similar moment. Before I could figure out how to escape his grip, another little boy saw him clinging to my neck and asked, 'Is his name Johnathan?' Surprised that he knew my son's name, I said, 'Yes, what's yours?' He told me. Then he started telling



Johnathan all about the stuffed animal he was carrying. Slowly and gently, Johnathan released his grip. Then he faced the boy and started telling him about his toys. A few moments later, as the new friends were playing, I slipped away without my son ever noticing.

Never forget the importance of inclusion.

I'm not going to end this article with a lecture on ways you can and should make others feel included. You're smart enough to figure that out on your own.

All I'm going to say is, 'Blessed are the peacemakers'.

Now, I think I'll go buy a Beyonce album.

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