

The Belonging Game

A live 3Ms + BASE demonstration using one soft ball (5–8 minutes)

Version: v1.2 (Dec 2025) **Created by:** Victor Allen, Mirror Development & Training Ltd

Why this exercise works (principles)

This exercise shows how adults, young people freeze when expectations are unclear (**Model**) or they fear looking incompetent (**Manageable**). People still step forward when it feels **meaningful** to help the group. Then, when someone is excluded, the room instinctively tries to restore **belonging** — even overriding the rules. It's a live demonstration that behaviour is often a protection of **belonging** and **self-esteem**, and the fix is clearer structure, stronger support, and meaningful purpose.

Materials and setup

- 1 soft, easily catchable ball (beanbag or juggling ball).
- Ask for 5 volunteers, then reduce to 4 if needed.
- Once volunteers are up, stand them in a loose **circle** facing inwards (you are part of the circle).

Facilitation steps

1) The Ask (Model missing)

Say: “I need five volunteers.” Then stop talking. Hold the silence for 20–40 seconds. If needed: “I just need four volunteers.”

2) Form the circle (still no reveal)

Bring the volunteers to the front and place them in a loose circle. **Do not show the ball yet.** Let the uncertainty sit for a moment.

3) Reveal the ball (Manageable + BASE shows up)

Only now produce the ball: “It is a simple catching/throwing exercise.” Notice any “I can’t” or “I’m not good” comments (save them for the debrief).

4) Make it manageable (support first)

If needed, gently reposition the most unsure volunteer so they become the **first** person you throw to. Reassure: gentle throw, no performance, drops are fine.

5) Establish the model

Set the order clearly: Me → 1 → 2 → 3 → 4 → Me. Run it once, cleanly.

6) Break the model on purpose

Throw to 2 (skipping 1). Repeat 2–3 cycles. Watch what happens: confusion, corrections, and often an instinct to include the excluded person.

7) Stop at the peak

Say: “Brilliant. Thank you.” Sit the volunteers down while the room is still feeling it.

Debrief mapping (say this)

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The 3Ms

- **Model:** At first, you didn't volunteer because you didn't know what you were signing up to.
- **Manageable:** Once the ball appeared, people protected themselves: "I'm not good at this" (fear of exposure).
- **Meaningful:** People step forward when it feels worthwhile — to help, reduce awkwardness, or move the group forward.

BASE

- **Belonging:** Exclusion creates a strong pull to restore inclusion — sometimes overriding instructions.
- **Autonomy:** Participation is a choice; leaders create conditions that make the choice easy.
- **Self-Esteem:** Disclaimers protect social standing before a mistake happens.

Close line:

Behaviour is often protection — of certainty (Model), capability (Manageable), belonging, and self-esteem.

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