

# My Connectedness Self-Coaching Guide

## *How can I handle my need to belong?*

Our strong need for belongingness can be understood by extending our simple model of the brain which we imagine comprises two brains – *Primitive* brain and *Advanced* brain. [See SGC – ‘How can I control my reactions better’]. Imagine it also comprises a third *Social* brain. The Social brain focuses on relationships. It has an evolutionary purpose: maintaining connections with those who keep us safe.

Although these three brains try to work together, they often conflict and we can have rapidly shifting struggles for control because they make their own decisions that can differ from each other. Our Primitive brain creates emotions and actions to keep us safe; our Advanced brain thinks things through rationally; and our Social brain creates emotions and actions to keep us connected to others. If the Social brain and the Advanced brain struggle to agree, the Social brain takes control because it’s much quicker and stronger than the Advanced brain. Understanding this, we can regain control and react more rationally, thus becoming both an independent and an interdependent person in society, as opposed to someone who may develop dependent or codependent relationships.

Humans are tribal with friendships, rivalries, alliances and power struggles. We have evolved to live interdependently with others and our need for belongingness gives us our identity and security. Our neurons activate when we feel and do something and when we see others feel and do the same thing. This helps us learn through imitation, enabling us to reflect body language, facial expressions, and emotions, enabling us to be empathetic and understand others’ intentions and states of mind. We are all very sensitive to facial expressions and body language. We look for praise, disagreement, disapproval, affirmation, inclusion, or opposition. Quickly we can begin adopting the norms of the tribe.

Connectedness can give us a sense of purpose, satisfaction, and security from feeling part of something bigger. Working with others on an important cause or trying to change things, can make us feel significant and valuable. We can feel great when the team wins and consoled when the team loses.

In contrast, we instinctively dread a lack of connectedness through being left out or shut out of the group. Social rejection produces strong negative emotions (including low self-esteem, depression, fear, and anger) and antisocial behaviour. It can cause us to act in ways that encourage acceptance and avoid rejection. (See *Rejection First Aid* overleaf). Feelings of affection and loyalty can prevent us from discarding unhealthy relationships and keep us connected to those we think we need for our ‘safety’. When we don’t agree with others in our group it’s difficult to speak honestly and openly or discuss new ideas. We find it hard to think freely and differently because thinking is often a group or social activity.

Sometimes belongingness can turn into a sense of ‘us versus them’. It can create situations where we view those who are ‘not of our tribe’ (different ethnicity, education, language, or beliefs) as the enemy and people to be feared rather than us all belonging to the human race.

A strong sense of belongingness can be a powerful experience with both positive and negative aspects. We should be aware of our need for connectedness and try to be objective about our desire for it.

*The most basic human desire is to feel like you belong. Fitting in is important. Simon Sinek*

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## More Information

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## *Rejection First Aid*

Neuroscience has shown that the pain we experience from social rejection is just as real in our brains as the pain we experience from physical injury. And just as physical pain can benefit from the application of rapid first aid, so can the pain of rejection.

When we experience rejection, we have a natural tendency to withdraw and protect ourselves from further pain. Also, we try to numb the pain and self sooth through food, alcohol and drugs. Studies have shown that the most effective way to reduce the pain of rejection is to reach out immediately to those around us – family, friends, work colleagues, church, sports and social clubs – and connect with people. Doing this revives our sense of belonging.

When we experience rejection we should apply, rapidly, the following first aid:

- 1 – We should be kind to ourselves, avoid negative self-talk, and be self-compassionate in order to revive our self-esteem.
- 2 – We should avoid solitude, but instead seek social connection, reaching out to connect with those around us.
- 3 – If circumstances don't allow (2), we should surround ourselves with reminders of those we love, e.g. photos, objects.
- 4 – We should recall all the qualities we *know* we have and list them. Each day we should choose a quality we have, possibly one related to our rejection, and write down some words about it, stating why that quality makes us valuable.

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