

Expanding Your Impact

Helping Newcomers Belong

The idea: Getting someone to show up once is only half the battle. Whether they ever come back depends on how they're treated that first time. A newcomer who feels welcomed, useful, and noticed becomes a regular; one who feels invisible quietly disappears.

"The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated." — William James

"You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than in two years by trying to get other people interested in you." — Dale Carnegie

"Wherever there is a human being, there is an opportunity for a kindness." — Seneca

FACILITATOR NOTES

Time. about 60–90 minutes total. Works in a classroom, youth group, or club. No materials or cost required.

Service today. Pick one option in Serve below and set it up before you begin.

Warm-up (10 minutes)

FACILITATOR NOTES

Keep this quick, short answers are great. Read the questions together.

- Think of a time you were new to a group. What made you want to come back, or not?
- What's the difference between being tolerated by a group and actually belonging to it?
- Why might a first-time volunteer feel awkward or out of place?
- What's one small thing someone could do that would instantly make a newcomer feel welcome?

Learn (10–20 minutes)

Bringing new people into service is a win, but it only sticks if they come back, and whether they do has almost nothing to do with the work and almost everything to do with how they felt. A first-timer walks in not knowing anyone, unsure what to do, half-expecting to feel like a spare part. If that's how the day goes, they won't return, no matter how good the cause. But if someone learns their name, gives them a real job, introduces them around, and makes them feel like they belong, they leave as part of the group. Helping newcomers belong is the quiet skill that turns a one-time helper into a lifelong one. It's hospitality, and it's what keeps a service group from leaking people as fast as it recruits them.

Newcomers usually come back when they feel:

- Welcomed: someone noticed them and learned their name.
- Useful: they were given a real job, not left standing around.
- Connected: they met a few friendly people and weren't alone.

A closer look. A new kid shows up to her first volunteer shift not knowing a soul. For the first twenty minutes she hovers at the edge, unsure what to do, half-deciding she won't come back. Then a regular notices, walks over, learns her name, hands her a real job, and introduces her to a couple of people. By the end she's laughing with the group and asking when the next one is. Same girl, same shift, the only difference was one person who made sure she wasn't on the outside. Most people don't quit serving because the work is hard. They quit because they felt like they didn't belong.

Why belonging keeps people serving. All the effort it takes to get someone to show up the first time is wasted if they never come back, and most people who drift away don't do it because they stopped caring. They drift because they felt like outsiders: no one talked to them, no one needed them, no one would notice if they vanished. Belonging fixes that. When a newcomer is welcomed, given something real to do, and folded into the group, serving stops being a thing they tried once and becomes a place where they're known. That's what turns first-timers into regulars, and regulars into the people who run things someday. A group that's good at welcoming grows. One that isn't keeps starting over.

How to help newcomers belong. Making someone feel they belong is simple once you're watching for it. You can:

- Notice them: spot the new or unsure person and go say hello first.
- Learn their name and use it: it's the fastest way to make someone feel real to a group.
- Give them a real job: nothing makes a person feel like a spare part faster than nothing to do.
- Fold them in: introduce them around, sit with them, and make sure they're not alone.

Keep these in mind.

- **First impressions decide.** Whether someone returns is usually settled in the first few minutes. Welcome them fast.
- **A name changes everything.** Learn it and use it. “Thanks for coming, Jordan” lands very differently than nothing.
- **Give them something to do.** A real job turns a bystander into a contributor, and contributors come back.
- **No one should stand alone.** Watch for the person on the edge of the group, and bring them in.

Serve (30–60 minutes)

Today you'll put this into practice in a real service activity. Here are ways to do it:

Option A — Be someone's welcome *(no cost, works in any setting)*

At your next service activity, take charge of one newcomer or unsure person. Greet them, learn their name, make sure they have a real job, and introduce them to a few people so they aren't standing alone. Be the reason they feel like part of the group, and the reason they come back. A few minutes of attention is the whole skill in action.

Option B — Build a welcome into your group *(low cost, a bit more effort)*

Set up a simple system so newcomers always feel welcome, not just when someone happens to notice. Try a greeter or “buddy” role that pairs every first-timer with a regular, a quick warm intro at the start,

name tags, or a friendly check-in. Make belonging something your group does on purpose, every single time.

Option C — Turn first-timers into regulars *(more effort; ongoing hospitality)*

Own the long game: help your group keep the people it brings in. With your mentor, follow up with newcomers (a thank-you, an invite to the next one), notice who didn't come back and reach out, and keep making new people feel needed until they're regulars. A group that holds onto its people instead of starting over every time is one you helped build.

Before you go (all options): Welcome newcomers within your group's service activities, in public, supervised settings with your mentor. Be friendly and inclusive without prying: don't push anyone to share personal information, and let your mentor handle sign-ups, contact details, and follow-up.

Reflect (10 minutes)

FACILITATOR NOTES

After serving, talk through a few of these together, then give everyone quiet time to write.

Who did you welcome, and what did you do? How did they respond?

Thinking back to being new somewhere, what would have helped you feel you belonged?

Why do you think people quit groups more over feeling left out than over the work itself?

What's one thing your group could do to make every newcomer feel welcome?

Then finish one or both sentences:

One thing I'll do to make a newcomer feel they belong is...

A way our group could welcome new people every time is...
