# Belonging Simulation Activity

This experiential exercise is designed to simulate an environment in which participants feel that they may not belong. For any simulation, it is important to create a space that is emotionally and physically safe so that participants can empathize with a student’s experience without triggering a negative reaction. A particularly experienced facilitator with social-work experience may enhance this activity in various ways. This version is designed for a facilitator with a relatively high level of experience but no social-work background.

To begin, choose an optional fake name that appears to carry authority (such as Dr. Pat Nelson, PhD) and write up four workshop norms: “No electronics, raise hands, arrive on time, show respect.” Then engage in the following steps:

**1**

**Play the Role:** Introduce yourself and your rules emphatically. Make it clear that you are in charge and that you won’t take any lip from anyone. Then pick one of the rules to insist upon. Ideally, there are at least two people in the room who have violated this rule, even in a small way. Point this out to them and firmly ask that they rectify the situation as soon as possible—for example, ask them to put away their phones; or if they are talking, ask that they do not talk unless they have raised their hands; or if they just arrived late, call them out for it.

**Debrief:** A few seconds into the next activity, take a “Time Out,” and explain that this isn’t really your name at all, but that you were playing a role. Highlight that you actually feel there is great wisdom in the room and that everyone can share insights and wisdom, and that you would like to hear insights from the people in the group. How did they feel when you introduced yourself? When you introduced the rules? When you called people out for breaking the rules?

**2**

**3**

**Connect to Students’ Experiences:** Share that this feeling of being judged “bad” or “less than,” even in a small activity like this, can hurt. But let’s multiply that. Imagine this is what happens to you every day, day by day, for years. Then, it might become the feeling of being held back in school, dropping out of school, or feeling rejected or unseen or uncared for in your school or even in your society at large. No facilitator ever pauses the action and debriefs with the person. Eventually, you just internalize the message that ***you do not belong***.

**4**

**Surface Ideas:** Ask participants to share ideas about what makes a learning environment that helps students develop a sense of belonging. Ask participants about how they grapple with the challenge of establishing clear rules (because that is important!) without creating a feeling that students are being judged or “less than.”