

RESEARCH-BASED FRAMEWORK

# 5 Year 7 Induction Activities That Build Belonging

Grounded in belonging uncertainty research: Cohen & Walton (2011), Bagnall (2024)

**The core problem:** Belonging uncertainty is a persistent, low-grade doubt about whether a student belongs in their new environment. It sets in during transition and responds to specific signals, not timetable tours. These five activities are designed to send those signals from day one.

## ACTIVITY 01

### The "We All Felt This" Story Share

Bring Year 9 or 10 students to share honest stories about their first term in Year 7: what was hard, what surprised them, how it got better. Don't ask for positivity. Ask for truth.

*Achievement gap halved; GPAs higher three years later (Walton & Cohen, 2011)*

## ACTIVITY 02

### One Adult Who Knows Their Name

Assign every student a named tutor, buddy, or mentor before arrival. Write their names on notebooks before day one. Someone here was expecting you. Give tutors specific week-one prompts. "How was lunch?" beats "How are you?"

*One trusted adult makes a measurable difference (Bagnall, 2024)*

## ACTIVITY 03

### Collaboration, Not Competition

A shared challenge with no single right answer, designed so no one can dominate. Sends the message: your contribution matters here. Co-write a class mission statement. The writing is the task; the artifact stays on the wall all year.

*Addresses implicit sorting that triggers belonging threat on arrival*

## ACTIVITY 04

### A Real Map of "How This Works"

Better yet: a scavenger hunt. Students navigate in small groups and find the spaces themselves. Cover the less obvious: quiet bathroom, what to do when late, who to find if they lose their timetable.

*Procedural clarity reduces transition worry from the start (Bagnall, 2024)*

## ACTIVITY 05

### Read a Story Together

Read *The Smart Cookie* by Jory John & Pete Oswald aloud. It is funny, disarming, and opens the conversation this class needs to have early: what do we do when something feels hard? What does this classroom do with mistakes? Those questions, answered together before anyone has struggled, build shared language from day one.

*Ideal for "adults and children to reflect on the classroom culture they want to create" (Books for Topics)*

## TWO MORE LOW-EFFORT MOVES

**About Me Survey.** Day one: what do you want me to know about you, and what do you hope to learn? Keep the surveys. Return them on the last day of the year.

**Assign or randomise seats.** Free seating forces social choices in a room full of strangers. Assigned seats remove that pressure. Frame it as "we mix often so everyone works with everyone."

## BEFORE AUGUST CHECKLIST

- Belonging signal sent before arrival (letter or video)
- Every student assigned one named adult
- Week-one prompts given to tutors/mentors
- The Smart Cookie* sourced and read aloud on day one
- Seats assigned or randomised for day one
- Story-share activity designed with Year 9/10 students
- Names written on notebooks before day one
- One logistical session replaced with a collaboration task
- About Me surveys collected and stored for year-end return
- Week 3 individual check-in touchpoint scheduled

*"Year 7 induction activities don't have to be elaborate. They have to be intentional. The signals you send on day one determine how students interpret the next six months."*