



# Soulful Home

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Finding the Sacred in  
Everyday Spaces

Building Belonging  
September 2025

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# The Welcome Mat

## What Does it Mean to be a Family That Builds Belonging

Like many parents and caregivers, I have memories of belonging that I can feel at my core. As I sit down to write the first Welcome Mat of the church year, there is one that jumps to the front of my mind: it's one of my children—probably when they were each around four years old—running full speed across the playground, arms open wide, laughing, straight into my arms, as I pick them up after their first day of preschool. I crouch down instinctively to meet them, arms wide, ready to catch the full force of them and their joy. That simple act of meeting each other with love and openness is what comes to mind when I think about building belonging. Because that's what belonging looks like, doesn't it? Having arms of love that you can throw your whole self into. Fully and exactly as you are.

As September settles and we are entering another season full of fresh starts—new teachers, new routines, new communities—as a parent, this question of belonging is at the forefront of my mind: Will my kids find other arms to receive and welcome the fullness of them? Especially, as my children are older now and looking toward their middle and high school communities as much as our family, I must trust my children's hearts to the welcoming arms of others. So maybe for us parents and caregivers, the question of belonging is also a question of trust and faith in the world around us.

And I suspect this is a question not just about the children in our lives but about ourselves as well. We all want to know that there's a place for us, a place where someone crouches down or leans over and embraces our fullness, too. This can be a complicated and hard question for many of us. So, friends, be ready for it to arise in your heart and be kind to yourself as you wrestle with it.

With all this in mind, our packet this month invites us to reflect on what it means to be a family that doesn't just hope for belonging, but one that builds it. Or to put it another way, Intentionality is also a part of belonging. It's not just about being welcoming in theory—it's about creating space again and again in our daily lives for each other's feelings, identities, stories, and needs.

So, this month, I invite you to look at belonging as a practice, not a destination. As a thing that lives intentionally in our tone of voice, the way we listen, the way we stay at the table when conversations get hard, or our children have a completely different idea of how something should go. As a thing that lives in the patience we offer when someone's still figuring out where they fit. And as the thing that has us asking: Who's missing? Have we made enough room? Have we stretched our circle wide enough? Are we remembering to say "You matter. You are loved. You belong here." Because this kind of belonging ripples outward. When we build it at home, our children can't help but take it with them out into the world.

So friends, as the busy routines of fall take root, may we not forget the simple power of offering and building belonging for one another. May we be families who crouch down, open our arms, and meet each other with love, again and again.

Blessed be.

**April**



# At the Table

## Exploring Building Belonging Through Discussions

The At the Table section engages the theme through question-driven family discussions. The questions are designed to be used at a family gathering, most often dinner, but also during a quiet moment in the living room, before a board game night, or while driving in the car. This section strengthens the bonds within a family as members learn more about each other by asking and answering evocative questions.

### How To Go About It

The most straightforward way to do this is to have parents and/or caregivers read off the questions they think will resonate the most with family members and have everyone take turns answering. Another fun way to do this is to create [a family question jar](#). To make this easier, we've listed all the questions below at the end of this packet with dotted lines you can cut along to make "question strips." You can then pull out the question jar and have family members choose a question/strip a few times each week.

### Discussion Questions

1. Lately, where do you feel the greatest sense of belonging? Our family home? Your friendship group? At school? On a sports team or in a club? At church? With grandparents?
2. Was there ever a time you wished to belong to a group but weren't invited or didn't get in? How did you handle those feelings?
3. Who is someone who has helped you feel like you belong? If you were to thank them, what would you say?
4. When have you helped somebody new feel that they belonged? (Think here of classmates, neighbors, newcomers to scouting troops, new babies or children in the extended family, etc.)
5. Is there a place or group to which you hope you never belong?
6. Some say loneliness is the opposite of belonging. What are some of the best ways to handle loneliness?
7. We talk about our pets as belonging to us. Is that the right word for it? Why or why not?
8. What group of animals would you most want to belong to: A herd of sheep? A pack of wolves? A flock of birds? A herd of elephants? A colony of ants, or bees? A pod of dolphins? Or another? And why?
9. When you feel that your possessions are out of place, somewhere they don't belong, are you the kind of person who is fine with that or does it stress you? How do you think the other members of your family would answer that question?
10. Which of your belongings do you really not like people touching or using? Which of your belongings are you most cool with sharing?
11. What outdoor place do you feel you most belong in? Why?
12. In which do you feel like you most belong: In a crowd of people or when you are by yourself?



# At Play

## Playing With Freedom as a Family

At Play suggests games, crafts, and activities to help families experience the theme through joy and fun.

### This Month's Treasure Hunt – An Eye for What Doesn't Belong!

This month's treasure hunt is all about noticing what seems a little out of place or like it doesn't belong. The ability to notice what's out of place is often the first step (and key skill) that helps us reach out to help people and things find belonging. Additionally, there is sometimes a beauty to something that sticks out and makes us look at things differently. Often, this is the first step to expanding our sense of what can belong. So, as you walk or ride around your neighborhood, look for things that make you say, "Hmm... does that belong?" And then with each discovery, ask as a family, "Does this out-of-place thing make us feel differently about belonging?"

### Examples of Finding What's Out of Place

- An invasive species of plant (If you're not sure, make your best guess while you're out and about, and then look it up later. Common invasive species include bush honeysuckle, kudzu, and English ivy, and more are described here: <https://insider.si.edu/2013/04/top-six-invasive-plant-species-in-the-united-states/>)
- Broken glass on the ground (Why doesn't this belong?)
- A weed or flower growing through a crack in the sidewalk
- A car is parked where it's blocking the sidewalk, part of a handicapped spot, a fire hydrant, or a driveway.
- A wild critter--or evidence of a wild critter--inside a building (mouse, moth, cricket, ladybug, etc.--why is it problematic for humans and these bugs to cohabitate? Is it always so?)
- Trash... and people seeing it, but just keep walking by
- A house painted in an unusual color, like bright pink
- Holiday lights that still up when the holidays are over
- The first fall leaf or the last green leaf of fall
- Someone walking their cat with a leash
- Anything that makes you stop and say, "Wait—what's that doing here?"





## Additional At-Play Options

### Option A: Family Game Night

Gather the family (and friends) for a fun game night! Soul Matters has heard from many sources that the following games highlight aspects of belonging, like cooperation, inclusion, empathy, listening, and building something together. These games spark conversations about connection, noticing others, and what it means to be part of a team or community: So give them a try this month and see if you agree!

- [Hoot Owl Hoot](#) (ages 4+)  
Players help the owls get back to the nest before sunrise—no competition, just shared strategy and mutual encouragement.
- [We're Not Really Strangers: Family Edition](#) (ages 6+)  
A conversation card game that helps family members learn about each other and grow closer. Builds emotional intimacy and openness.
- [Just One](#) (ages 8+)  
A word-guessing game where everyone gives clues, but if two clues match, they get canceled! Encourages creativity, perspective-taking, and making space for unique contributions.
- **Two Truths and a Lie--One Doesn't Belong!**  
This game invites families to try to fool each other about which statements belong to the truth, and which ones do not. It is especially challenging among family members who know each other well.  
  
To play, each person comes up with three statements about themselves, two of which are true, and one of which is not. Make the three statements to each other, and have the other family members try to guess which one is the lie. (Note: This works especially well with teens over text!)  
  
You can also mix it up by telling two truths and a lie about friends or neighbors that your family kind of knows, but you know better. For instance, tell two truths and a lie about your best friend and see if your parents and siblings can figure it out. Or, as a parent, you might tell two truths and a lie about your mom or dad (your kids' grandparents). There surely are still things your kids don't know about their grandparents! :)

### Option B: Make a Belonging Playlist

Each family member chooses a few songs that make them feel strong, safe, or loved. Make a playlist and listen to it while cooking dinner, in the car, or during family cleaning time. Talk about why each song feels like “home.”



## Option C: Welcome Mats for Belonging: A Family Craft

Creating welcome mats together is a fun and meaningful way to explore how our homes can be places of inclusion, care, and connection. It invites each family member to think about what makes people feel seen and safe when they arrive, and how we can extend belonging from our front door outward.

### Materials You'll Need

- Plain doormats (coir mats work well—you can find them at craft stores, dollar stores, or online)
- Outdoor acrylic paint or Paintbrushes/Foam stamps
- Painter's tape or stencils (optional)
- Paper plates for paint and old newspapers or a plastic tablecloth to protect your work area
- Chalk or pencil for sketching designs first (optional)

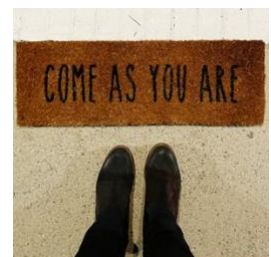
### Directions

1. Start with a Story Circle (optional). Before diving into paint, gather your family and ask:
  - What makes *you* feel welcome when you visit a new place?
  - How do we show someone they belong in our home?
  - What could our welcome mat *say* or *show* to help others feel safe and included?
2. Invite each person in the family to sketch or plan their design on paper first. It could include:
  - Words: "Welcome," "You Belong Here," "Come As You Are," "Hola," "Peace," etc.
  - Symbols: Rainbows, hearts, chalices, open doors, hands, stars, etc.
  - Names of everyone in the family or your pronouns ("She/He/They are welcome here")
3. Lay down a newspaper or a drop cloth. Use painter's tape or stencils to create clean lines if desired. Then paint directly onto the mat. Tip: Dab, don't brush, for clearer letters and shapes.
4. Allow the mat to dry for at least 24 hours before using it outside.
5. Bless or dedicate your mats by gathering together once everyone is done, and bless your mats with a simple family ritual:

*"May this mat greet all who enter with kindness. May it remind us that everyone deserves to feel welcome, included, and safe. May our home be a place of love and belonging—for each of us, and for all who visit."*

### Family Reflection Questions:

- What does your mat say about what kind of home we are?
- How do you think someone would feel if they saw your mat before coming in?
- What are other ways we can say "you belong" to people, without using words?



# At the Bedside and in the Book Nook

At The Bedside & In the Nook suggests books that help families engage the monthly themes with their imagination. This story-centered section honors the unique way stories enrich our sense of what's possible, expand our empathy, and build our identities.

## Neither

by Airlie Anderson (suggested for kids 3-7)

A colorful story about a creature who doesn't fit into any one group—and how they help create a new land where everyone belongs.

**Invitation to Connect:** *Parents, ask your children how they can help people fit in and how that can help people feel like they belong.*

## Big

by Vashti Harrison (suggested for kids 4-8)

A powerful story full of compassion and strength that traces a child's journey to self-love and feeling good about belonging in their body and in the world.

**Invitation to Connect:** *Parents use this as an opportunity to talk about the power of words to both hurt and heal when it comes to building belonging.*

## The Day You Begin by Jacqueline Woodson

by Jacqueline Woodson (suggested for kids 5-9)

A powerful and gentle book about what it feels like to be different—and how sharing our stories can help us feel less alone.

**Invitation to Connect:** *Parents use this as an opportunity to talk about what it means to belong to yourself and how belonging can be built by being yourself.*

## I Talk Like a River

by Jordan Scott (suggested for kids 7-10)

A beautiful story that invites kids to reflect on what it feels like to be misunderstood or different, and how being seen and understood by even one person can be the beginning of belonging.

**Invitation to Connect:** *Parents, use this as an opportunity to ask your kids if they have ever felt like no one understood how they were feeling, and what helped them feel more connected again?"*





# In Front of the Screen

## Watching Meaningful Movies Together

In Front of the Screen offers families ways to connect with the monthly theme and each other through movies and TV shows.

### **Bluey – Season 2, Episode 32 – “Army” (G)**

In this episode, Jack, a new student who struggles with paying attention and following instructions, feels like he doesn’t quite fit in, he doesn’t belong.. But at school, he meets Rusty, who welcomes him into a game of playing “army.” Through their imaginative play, Jack not only finds a friend but also begins to realize he’s capable, strong, and valuable, and that he belongs just the way he is.

**Invitation to Connect:** *Parents, after watching, talk with your kids about what might be one act of welcome and inclusion (like Rusty inviting Jack to play) that they could do to help someone feel like they truly belong. You could also have a chat about how this episode shows that belonging isn’t about changing yourself—it’s about being accepted as you are.*

### **The Iron Giant (PG 6+)**

Snuggle up as a family and watch what happens when a mysterious robot from outer space crash-lands near a small town, a boy named Hogarth befriends him, and protects him from those who fear what they don’t understand. The Iron Giant explores how true belonging means being accepted for who you are, not feared for what makes you different.

**Invitation to Connect:** *Parents, use this movie as an opportunity to talk with your kids about how we treat those who seem different, and how we can choose to be kind, brave, and inclusive—even when others aren’t.*

### **Zootopia (PG 8+)**

Dive into a city where animals of every kind live together—but not always in harmony—rookie bunny cop Judy Hopps teams up with a fox named Nick to solve a mystery. Along the way, they uncover bias, stereotypes, and what it takes to build a true community. Zootopia shows us that belonging doesn’t mean sameness—it means being respected and valued just as you are.

**Invitation to Connect:** *Parents, use this movie as an opportunity to talk about fairness, bias, and how we all have a role to play in making spaces where everyone feels safe, seen, and accepted.*

### **Wonder (PG 10+)**

A great movie about a young boy named Auggie Pullman, who was born with a facial difference. When Auggie steps into a mainstream school for the first time, he is met with stares, struggles, and surprising friendships. Wonder reminds us that belonging begins when we choose kindness and see each other with open hearts.

**Invitation to Connect:** *Parents, use this movie as an opportunity to talk with your kids about what it means to welcome others, how we handle differences with compassion, and how each of us helps create spaces where everyone feels they truly belong.*



# In the Toolbox

## Strategies to Help Our Kids and Ourselves Navigate the Complicated Stuff

In the Toolbox offers parents resources to better understand the well-established and newly emerging challenges of being a child today. It's all about equipping parents to be better guides and companions for their kids.

### Resource One: Creating a Strong Sense of Belonging

<https://www.rayfamilytherapy.com/blog/creating-a-strong-sense-of-belonging-practical-tips-for-building-deep-connections-and-meaningful-relationships-with-your-children>

Five practical tips for building deep connections and meaningful relationships with your children.

### Resource Two: Raising Multiracial Children, Part 1: Examining Multiracial Identity

<https://www.embracerace.org/resources/raising-multiracial-children-part-1-examining-multiracial-identity>

“...about the pivotal role families play in shaping how multiracial children come to understand themselves and the world around them.”

### Resource Three: Connecting Children to Their Neighborhoods: Deepening a Sense of Belonging

<https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/connecting-children-to-their-neighborhoods-deepening-a-sense-of-belonging>

On helping children connect more readily to extended families and friends, cultural groups, neighborhoods, and communities.

### Resource Four: 12 Ways to Make Foster Kids Feel Welcome

<https://www.metrofamilymagazine.com/12-ways-to-make-foster-kids-feel-welcome/>

“With so much uncertainty in a foster child’s life, it is up to the foster parent to create an environment that allows the child to feel safe, comfortable, and accepted. Here are 12 ways we tried to do that for our children while we were fostering them...”

### Resource Five: Guided Meditation – Pathways To Belonging

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDGPC5VrZcw>

“Our deepest suffering comes from feelings of separation, and as a species... This guided practice explores deepening our belonging to our living body, emotions, others, and awareness.



# On the Porch

## Connecting and Sharing Stories with [Your Village](#)

On the Porch uses thoughtful questions to open space for you and your parenting partners or parent/caregiver friends to connect more deeply with each other and think more deeply about how the monthly theme has shown up in your life and can show up in a more intentional way.

### How to Go About It

Bring these questions with you when the time comes to hang out with your co-parent or parenting/caregiver buddy. Treat the questions less as a quiz and more like doorways inviting you into the world of mutual storytelling and memory. Go through them all or pick a few that call to you most.

### Questions

1. Do we (meaning you and the person you're speaking with) belong to each other? In which ways does this phrase feel comforting and loving, and in which ways does it feel possessive and problematic?
2. Have you ever had to sacrifice belonging for integrity? How about right now? Is your current source of belonging asking you to compromise your personal sense of wholeness?
3. What does belonging look like in your family? What practices, routines, or values help create that sense?
4. What did belonging (or not belonging) feel like for you as a child? How does that shape the way you parent?
5. What are the top three things you want your child/children to grow up understanding about inclusion and welcoming differences?
6. How do we model being welcoming adults, not just to our own children but to other kids, parents, or families in our communities?
7. How do our UU values (like radical hospitality, interdependence, or love at the center) guide the way we build belonging in our homes? How has our UU faith taught you something unique about building belonging?
8. How do we create space for our children's full selves, including parts of them we don't always understand or relate to?
9. How has your sense of belonging shifted lately in the spaces you inhabit the most? Work? Church? Gym? Friendships? Is belonging deepening? Slipping away for known or unknown reasons? Are you more and more feeling the itch to leave more and more?
10. How do you help your kids navigate times when they don't feel like they belong—at school, on a team, in church, etc.?
11. What's something small your family has done (or could try) to build more belonging in your neighborhood or community?



# Alongside the Chalice

Family spiritual practices and rituals are crucial for kids, youth, and adults. While lighting a chalice at home is a beautiful family practice, it can often be the only explicit UU identity practice we bring into our homes. So our Alongside the Chalice section offers a different UU practice, observance, or ritual for families to try out each month, with the hope that a few stick and become woven into the repeated and treasured rhythms of family life.

## **Sacred Circles: “Roses, Buds, and Thorns” with a Belonging Twist**

Once a week (or over a shared meal), take turns naming:

- Rose – a moment this week when you felt like you really belonged
  - Thorn – a moment when you felt left out or invisible
  - Bud – something you’re hoping will help you or someone else feel more included
- Optional: Close with a simple UU affirmation like, “We are all worthy of love and belonging.”

## **"One More Chair" Ritual**

Once a week, set an extra plate or chair at the table during a meal. Let it represent someone who might not always feel like they belong—at school, work, church, in the world. Talk together about how your family might help them feel more welcome, or what barriers to belonging they face.

## **Threshold Practice: Welcoming Each Other Home**

Choose a small moment of intentionality when each family member returns home—whether it’s a hug, a hand on the shoulder, or eye contact with a shared “I’m glad you’re home.” These micro-rituals reinforce that each person matters and is missed.



# The Extra Mile

The Extra Mile section is for families who want to continue exploring the theme of the month through larger adventures, more complex projects, or simply through additional modalities not otherwise included in the packets. A bit more effort, but well worth it!

## Mending Beloved Belongings

There are plenty of reasons to fix or mend your belongings rather than throw them out when they are in disrepair:

- To keep something you like or enjoy around longer
- To reduce your degree of consumerism
- To keep something out of the landfill
- To learn a new skill--repairing

For this Extra Mile, find something among your belongings that you'd like to try and fix rather than throw out. This might be a toy, an item of clothing, a game missing a few pieces, a bike or skateboard, etc. You might dive in and learn as you go, or look for suitable tutorials on YouTube. Your community may have some handy resources, too: maker spaces, vocational programs, and 4-H clubs are all places filled with resourceful folks.

## A Family Covenant & Celebration Ritual

Bring the whole family together to co-create a shared agreement about how you want to treat one another and celebrate the unique ways each person contributes to making your family a place of belonging. It's a chance to affirm that everyone belongs, just as they are, and that in your family, belonging is built on purpose. \*\* This activity takes about 60 minutes and can be done all at once or spread over a weekend.

### Gather Your Materials

- Poster board or a large sheet of paper
- Markers, crayons, colored pencils, optional: ribbon, glue, collage materials for decorating
- Small candles, battery tea lights, or a string of twinkle lights
- A favorite family snack or treat to enjoy after

### Step 1: Set the Tone with Wonder

- Begin by lighting a chalice or candle (real or symbolic). Say something like: *"Tonight, we're creating something special together—something that shows how we want to care for each other and help each other belong. Our words, actions, and promises shape our home and help it feel safe, kind, and full of love."*
- You can also begin with a reading or a song that reminds your family of your shared values.



## Step 2: Create Your Family Covenant

- Explain: A covenant is a promise—a way we agree to treat each other. Unlike rules, covenants are made together, and they come from the heart. Ask each person:
  - What helps you feel safe, loved, and included?
  - What do you need from the rest of us to feel like you belong?
  - How do you want us to act when things are hard?
- As people share, write their ideas down on a large piece of paper. Then, work together to turn the ideas into simple, positive statements like:
  - We listen when someone needs to talk.
  - We say sorry and begin again.
  - We notice when someone feels left out and invite them in.
  - We celebrate what makes each of us unique.
- Let everyone decorate the covenant with drawings, symbols, or handprints. Title it something like: “How We Belong to Each Other” or “Our Family Covenant.”
- Hang it somewhere visible and meaningful.

## Step 3: Celebrate Each Other’s Light

- After you’ve created your covenant, take time to celebrate how each person already helps your family be a place of belonging. Set out the candles or tea lights. Go around the circle and take turns saying something like:
  - “I see the way you help us belong by...” (e.g., “making us laugh,” “asking deep questions,” “being kind to animals,” “snuggling when someone’s sad.”)
- Light a candle for each person after their affirmation, or string up a light for every person as their gifts are named.
- Make sure every person gets celebrated, including grown-ups.

## Step 4: Sweeten the Moment

- Enjoy a small treat together. Toast to your family with juice or cider. You might say: *“We belong to each other. Let’s carry these promises into the days ahead.”*

## Optional Follow-Ups

- Take a photo of the covenant and put it in your family photo album or journal.
- Revisit it at the start of each season or when big changes happen.
- Let new guests or visitors add to the covenant over time.





# Blessing of Belonging

Dear fellow bear huggers, school friend welcomers, and invitation senders,

May your arms be open wide,  
offering squeezes to those who need comfort  
and high fives to those who need courage.

May your eyes notice who's on the edge,  
and your hearts make room for the quiet, the different,  
the ones waiting to be seen.

May your home be a soft place to land—  
for each other, and for anyone who needs a bit of home.

May you celebrate what makes each of you unique,  
while remembering how good it feels  
to be part of something bigger than yourself.

May your table stretch,  
your circles widen,  
and your love grow strong enough  
to welcome the world in.

And dear ones  
may you also lean into the spaces where you feel seen,  
held, and wholly welcome.  
May you take time to fill your own cup  
with connection, laughter, and rest.

And when your child comes home hurting,  
feeling outside the circle,  
may you find the strength to listen gently,  
dry their tears,  
and remind them they are never alone.

Blessed be, and may it be so.

~ ***April Rosario***



## **Question Jar Cut-Outs**

*We invite you to write your own questions as well  
We also remind you that questions that evoke stories are often the most impactful.*

**Lately, where do you feel the greatest sense of belonging?  
Our family home? Your friendship group? At school? On a  
sports team or in a club? At church? With grandparents?**

**Was there ever a time you wished to belong  
to a group but weren't invited or didn't get in?  
How did you handle those feelings?**

**Who is someone who has helped you feel like you belong? If  
you were to thank them, what would you say?**

**When have you helped somebody new feel that they  
belonged? *(Think here of classmates, neighbors, newcomers to  
scouting troops, new babies or children in the extended family, etc.)***

**Is there a place or group to which you hope  
you never belong?**

**Some say loneliness is the opposite of belonging. What are  
some of the best ways to handle loneliness?**

**We talk about our pets as belonging to us. Is that the right word for it? Why or why not?**

**What group of animals would you most want to belong to:  
A herd of sheep? A pack of wolves? A flock of birds?  
A herd of elephants? A colony of ants, or bees?  
A pod of dolphins? Or another kind of group? And why?**

**When you feel that your possessions are out of place,  
somewhere they don't belong, are you the kind of  
person who is fine with that or does it stress you?  
How do you think the other members of your family  
would answer that question?**

**Which of your belongings do you really not like people  
touching or using? Which of your belongings are you  
most cool with sharing?**

**What outdoor place do you feel you most belong in? Why?**

**In which do you feel like you most belong:  
In a crowd of people or when you are by yourself?**

# Connect With More Inspiration For You and Your Family!

Parents can join our Facebook and Instagram pages for  
daily Inspiration on our themes:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/?ref=settings>

Instagram: [https://www.instagram.com/soul\\_matters\\_circle/](https://www.instagram.com/soul_matters_circle/)

Parents and youth will want to check out  
our [Spotify](#) & [YouTube](#) music playlists on the monthly themes.

## Credits

Soulful Home packets are prepared by  
**April Rosario,**

Our Soul Matters Director of RE Resources and [Family Ministry Coordinator](#)

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