You are not alone.
You belong.
And it gets better.
These are a few of a handful of powerful messages that an elegantly designed "belonging intervention" by social psychologist and Stanford assistant professor Gregory Walton conveys to study participants who are going through a difficult period.

In a series of ongoing studies, first published in 2007 in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, the belonging intervention uses a technique known as "attributional retraining" to help people shift blame for negative events from "It's just me" to "I'm not alone, and there are others going through it."

The goal is to convey to the subjects that when bad things happen, it doesn't mean they don't belong in general. [...] What is the opposite of loneliness? Is it belonging?

Because as humans, we need to belong. To one another, to our friends and families, to our culture and country, to our world.

Belonging is primal, fundamental to our sense of happiness and well-being.

Belonging is a psychological lever that has broad consequences, writes Walton. Our interests, motivation, health and happiness are inextricably tied to the feeling that we belong to a greater community that may share common interests and aspirations.

Isolation, loneliness and low social status can harm a person's subjective sense of well-being, as well as his or her intellectual achievement, immune function and health. Research shows that even a single instance of exclusion can undermine well-being, IQ test performance and self-control.

Walton’s earlier studies demonstrated that a sense of social belonging can affect motivation and continued persistence, even on impossible tasks. That is, if you don’t feel like you belong, you are both less motivated and less likely to hang in there in the face of obstacles.

Even outside a research setting, these are valuable lessons we can all draw from as we navigate life's difficult circumstances. Though Walton's research has involved only students, his work has powerful implications for the workplace and other contexts.