

Relational Inclusion blog #3: Rewards and Sanctions

### **Rewards and sanctions**

Rewards and sanctions have intrigued me as a school leader and a parent for along time now. From a relationally Inclusive ‘purist’ perspective all the evidence suggests that rewards and sanctions simply don’t work – they might work in the short term but are counter productive over time and have little impact in terms of as a learning experience for the young people. I must reiterate; this isn’t an acceptance of or excuse for ‘bad’ behaviour. It doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t use ‘logical consequences’ (and this isn’t just semantics). But punitive consequences (and by this I simply mean a punishment without having really thought the intended learning and outcomes behind) simply doesn’t work. If it did, our prisons wouldn’t be over-crowded.

And so many staff and school leaders say ‘but kids love a sticker’ – and they do. My reading this week has been around intrinsic motivation – after all, isn’t that what we want for our children?

*This was in Schools Week last week:*

The DfE’s decision to end the scheme is the latest in a string of cost-saving cuts to initiatives launched under previous Conservative governments, including the Latin Excellence Programme, computer hubs and language hubs.

Government tsar Tom Bennett, who leads the behaviour hubs scheme, said: “The behaviour hubs have been a tremendous success, and have helped many hundreds of schools improve their behaviour cultures.

“I hope that in the future the programme can continue in the DNA of new school improvement support packages, especially post-inspection. I think this would work particularly well in conjunction with the new RISE teams.”

My question is, did the behaviour hubs/ will RISE consider what really lies behind behaviour? Can we ever / are we ready to / is it time to move away from a rewards and punishment based school system?

As L. Tobin says:

1) *the misbehaviour of troubled children is seldom what it appears to be. Understanding this, I believe, is the only place to start. No child has a need to create a life of conflict*

I have a series of quotes from Sarah Ockwell-Smith's book, Gentle Discipline:

2) For now, society remains deeply entrenched in the belief that children misbehave at school because they lack the motivation to do better

**On Punishment:**

3) There is a very fine line between effective consequences that teach children to do and be better and those that make them feel bad without necessarily teaching them anything, due to their inability to think critically, analytically and hypothetically.

4) We may no longer use the cane or the dunce hat, but in most cases, school-based discipline is a matter of doing what has always been done with very little thought for anything outside this deeply entrenched system.

5) In this discipline for the masses approach, the individual needs of the children tend to be over looked. The emphasis is on control and compliance: the schools control; the children have to comply.

**On Rewards:**

6) The more you reward your child for something. The less likely they are to repeat the behaviour. As Alfie Kohn says, *"The more we want our children to want to do something, the more counterproductive it will be to reward them for doing it."*

7) No real learning takes place when children are disciplined using rewards, the child is simply complying because they want what is on offer.

8) And while it may only be a sticker today, how do you get a thirteen-year old to do what you ask of them? By using small rewards when the child is young, you are setting yourself up for greater issues when they are older.

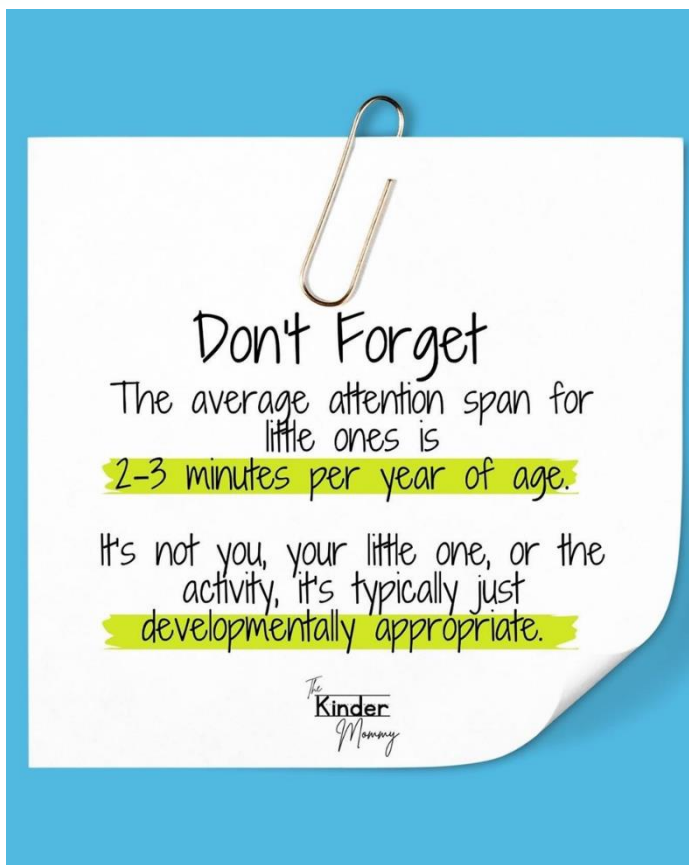
And finally:

9) Most undesirable behaviour at school is caused by children experiencing difficulties – perhaps relating to friends, home, something of a sensory nature, concentration or a lack of understanding. How do rewards and punishments fix these problems? They don't. In fact, they are likely to make the child feel even worse, by highlighting the fact that they do not have the skills needed to change their behaviour.

This week's article looks at the origins of the 'zero tolerance', 'sweat the small stuff' and the 'no excuses approach' to running schools.

[The evolution of 'no excuses' behaviour approaches | Tes](#)

And this week's image:

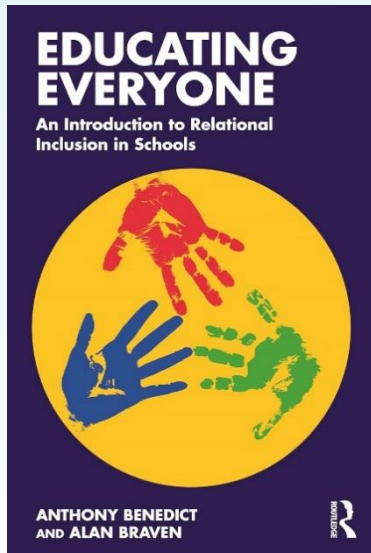


If you find the Relational Inclusion blog useful, feel free to share with your networks.

If you would like adding to the mailing list please email Hannah:

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Our book, *Educating Everyone: An Introduction to relational Inclusion in Schools* comes out in April and is available to pre-order here:



Thanks for reading

Anthony Benedict

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