

Relational Inclusion blog #6: How I got it wrong this morning

This week I would like you to indulge me a little whilst I tell you how *I got it wrong* this morning. I will start by telling the story without context. Then I will add the context and try and show how easy as a parent it is to get it quite wrong quite quickly. I will also show how this can impact on schools and how inadvertently we can add secondary trauma without even realising...

This morning my little boy (he's 4) had on a fleece instead of his jumper. As we got ready to get in the car I tried to put his coat over top but it wouldn't fit. I took the inside lining out of his coat, put his arm back in the sleeve to show him it was ok, picked him up and bundled him into the car.

When we arrived at school, I got him out of the car, pulled his coat on and went to get my daughter out of the car. My son said, "I'm not wearing that." took off his coat and threw it on the floor.

I heard myself saying, "If you don't pick it up there will be no more polos ever again." (We have some 'polo' treat mornings). My other daughter had picked his coat up at this point. I told my first daughter to put the coat down and explained to my son that he shouldn't throw his coat on the floor and that he must carry it into school. He said it was too heavy to carry. My second daughter asked why I was cross with my son. I explained that it was because he had thrown his coat on the floor.

He reluctantly picked up his coat, his face wasn't sure whether to laugh or cry. I picked him up and his coat and carried him into school tickling his tummy until he chuckled. I bundled him into breakfast club and left.

And then, once in the car, I unpicked it all and felt terrible!

- 1) We were running late. This wasn't my children's fault – they don't really have a sense of time. And in reality, although I was maybe 10 minutes later than usual, it wasn't going to impact my day. Clearly my window of tolerance was narrowing.
- 2) Kids like routine. He doesn't usually wear a fleece. So that is something different he will feel but is too young to be able to articulate himself.
- 3) His fleece was thicker than the layer he usually wears under his coat. Although he could say that he didn't want his coat, he was unable to really explain why – i.e this morning feels different / my coat isn't comfortable on top of my fleece / I'm warm in my fleece so I don't actually need a coat etc
- 4) When I tried to force his coat on for the second time, he probably thought all of these things as experiencing some sensory issues. Afterall there is nothing worse



than when your coat feels too tight under your armpits! His way of articulating this was to take his coat off and drop it on the floor. Fair enough actually for a 4-year-old.

- 5) I then made two ridiculous threats – *no polos* – and *ever again*. This was ridiculous:
 - a) the polos have no connection to the coat so he wouldn't be unable to understand why I would threaten this
 - B) ever again – I have already explained that children have no concept or little concept of time. Why would his discomfort result in a lifetime ban?
- 6) Also, my stress response reflected my frustration; my fault for being late; my need to manipulate my child into doing what I wanted without thinking about what he needed and felt. I needed action quickly so made ridiculous threats that were unfair, unlikely to be followed through and meaningless in helping solve the situation.
- 7) I then dropped him at school and ran. I did tickle his tummy, and we did have a cuddle so potentially no harm done. But children are sensitive and possibly I've left a little boy even more confused, on his own and about to start his day.
- 8) Now the school have no idea of any of this. A) emotionally he may now be unsettled; b) he has issues with his coat and fleece – what happens when school ask him to put it on? There are also potential sensory issues as all of this feels different to his usual morning experience.
- 9) I don't think my son will dysregulate this morning – but any of these things could cause dysregulation and if school don't know how to manage this – or something much more serious had happened – look how quickly this could escalate and look how quickly a child could find themselves emotionally dysregulating and then facing consequences / suspension or expulsion without having a true understanding of how they ended up in this situation in the first place.

And this is why we need Relational Inclusion. This is maybe a 10-minute snapshot of my morning. I got it wrong but not on purpose. Now think of those less fortunate, those families living with trauma and poverty and disadvantage. And think of how their morning might have been. Finally – we are coming back after half term – imagine how this last week might have been for some of our children and young people.

I'm sharing this because I think it's useful; because we don't always get it right – and lord knows, I bang on about a relationally inclusive approach *all* the time; because I do understand how the brain works, how children's brains develop – and yet in the moment, I still get it wrong.

But that is ok – reflection is good, repair will take place after school. But many staff, parents, carers and children don't know any of this – surely that is our job – to help and to teach.

Which brings me to my first quote:

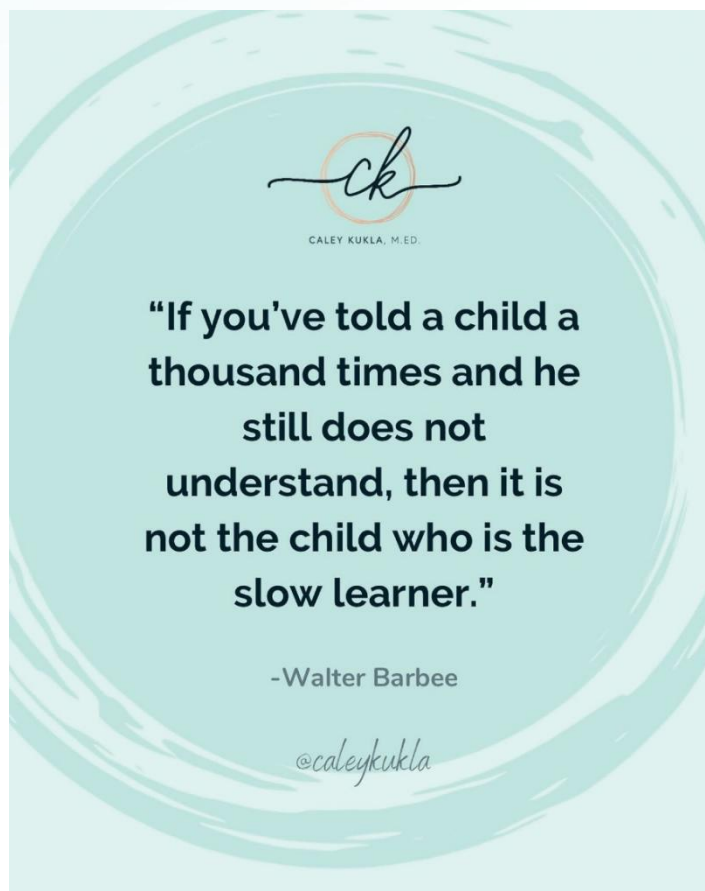
- 1) *Love what you teach, but love who you teach more* – Dr Brad Johnson

And my second quote is about how what we do impacts on children more than what we say (I'm still cringing about my poor son!)

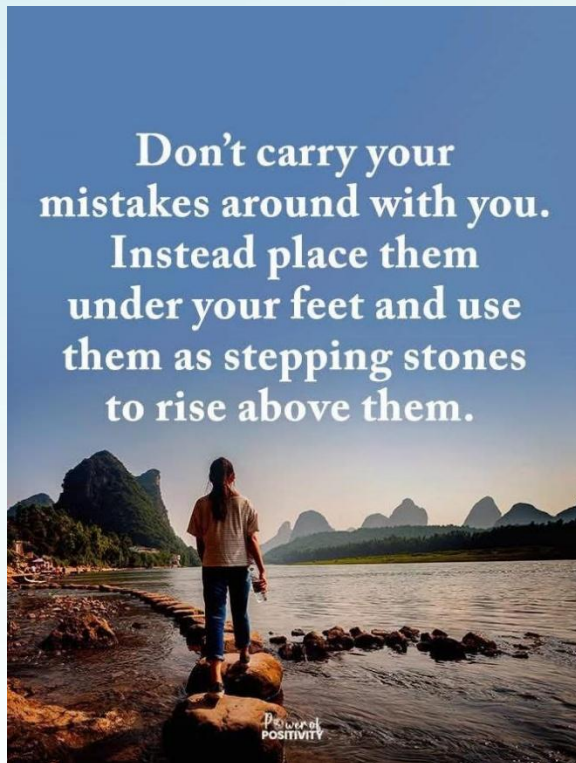
- 2) *The fact is that children do not learn values by hearing Barney sing about sharing and being nice to animals or listening to our clumsy efforts to read them morality tales disguised as bedtime stories. Sure, these are good reinforcements: Aesop's fables have had quite a shelf life. In reality though, children have always gotten their real education in ethics from watching how the adults in their lives behave. They do as we do, not as we say*

Alvin Rosenfiled & Nicole Wise

Two 'image' quotes to share this week:



This is one for me after my morning:



My shared article this week is about child poverty:

[More than one in three children in poverty as UK deprivation hits record high | Poverty | The Guardian](#)

Which also reminds me of some stats which were shared at a fed conference in January:

Child Poverty – Facts and Figures

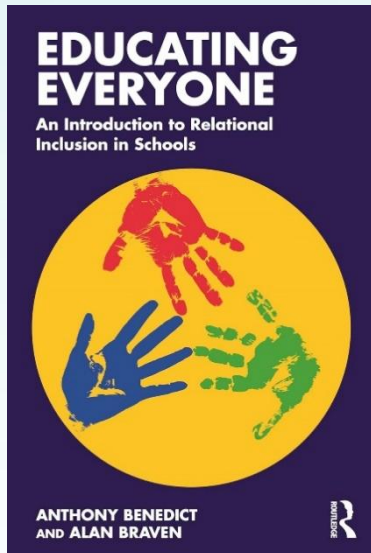
- **4.3 million** children are growing up in poverty in the UK
- **9** Children in an average classroom of **30** (30%) are living in poverty
- **7 out of 10** children living in poverty have at least one parent in paid work
- **47%** of children from Black and minority ethnic groups are in poverty, compared to 24% of white children
- **44%** of children in lone-parent families are in poverty
- **900 000** children in poverty in England alone miss out on free school meals
- Roughly **1 billion** children worldwide experience multidimensional poverty – meaning they lack necessities like food, water, shelter, education and health care.
- Some **333 million** children live in extreme poverty, surviving on less than £1.66 each day

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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