

## Relational Inclusion blog #8: Hearing the Feelings

I seem to have slipped into starting these blogs with a day in my life - I hope that's ok. (I only get occasional snippets of feedback, but comments are always welcome.)

My mornings are always 'interesting'. For those of you who don't know me, I have three children (9,7 and 4), a cat and a chameleon. This morning two things of note happened.

Time is tight and, on our way out of the house, my middle daughter announced she hated her lunch box. The old me was ready to pounce with: "Do you know how long it takes your mum to get your lunch ready? Do you know how hard it is to get three packed lunches ready? We're going to be late for school etc etc.

However, this time I managed to *practice the pause*. Her lunch box is this fancy plastic thing with all different compartments. What she went on to explain was, "It's just it's really hard for me to open all the different compartments and sections."

We forget as grownups what being 7 is like. I can't begin to imagine the rush and hustle and bustle of a 7-year-old's lunch time. The last thing she needs is a lunch box she can't actually get into. I rarely think about the difference between my hands and those little hands a seven-year-old has.

So are we really listening and what are we hearing - their voice or our adult thoughts?

The second point of note happened at school drop off. This morning, as I walked out of their school (I generally have to carry my little boy in) I half overheard a conversation between another mum and one of the staff at the gate. I wasn't really paying attention. She said something like: "He hates breakfast club but I have to get to work."

I looked at the little boy standing next to her, but he didn't seem overly upset. As I looked up another little boy, maybe he was 8 or 9, was walking towards me, and he looked me in the eye and said, "Stop staring at me you idiot."

I automatically replied, "oh dear, those words aren't very kind.'

Equally I could feel my own nervous system respond. My old instinct wanted to say - *how rude - you are 9 - how dare you talk to me like that*.

The 'new' me wanted to stop, get down to his level and say, "Oh dear. I'm wondering if you're not feeling so great this morning." - I had to stop myself - he's not my little boy and it's not my school. Obviously, this was the little boy the mum was talking about.

As I drove away, the old me wanted to wind down the window and tell the mum how rude her child had been to me. The new me wanted to help this mum who needed to get to work and this dysregulated little boy who was clearly not having the most settled start to the

day. Another me wondered when and how we got to a point that children were so unhappy first thing in the morning that they would talk and act their feelings to a total stranger. Maybe they always have.

What it did make me think was: are we really listening to what children (and adults) are saying? And if we are listening - are we hearing the feelings behind their words; are we hearing our own potentially triggered feelings behind their words; or are we being truly curious about ourselves and those around us?

This week's gathering of quotes are intended to encourage reflection (a bit like my morning)- how can we look at things differently and help the young people become who they are supposed to be?

- 1) *Inclusion isn't just **inviting** someone to sit at your table. It is **believing** they belong there. (unknown)*
- 2) *We need to get the idea out of our heads that education is limited to something we do with a book, paper and pencil. (unknown)*
- 3) *Do you want them to listen or sit still?  
You can't always have both. (the therapist parent)*
- 4) *You can't punish a child into acting like an adult any faster than you can punish a caterpillar into being a butterfly. (Shatana Austin-Sparks)*

And let's try to remember what it was like to be a child:

Explain the why. When you say no.  
When you ask for a task to be done.  
Children can't learn why  
something is necessary or  
build skills just by hearing  
"because I said so".  
Giving reasons will create  
a better understanding,  
build mutual respect,  
connection and trust.

THREE LITTLE BIRDS-RAISING  
KIDS ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

If we can reflect, then we can help our children become reflective and that might just change the world. My quote to print and pin on your wall this week is below:

“

I have learned that while we cannot control all of the chaos that is going on around us, we do have an important responsibility and opportunity to raise the next generation of people who will influence positive change that will ripple throughout the world. We have the ability to create supportive spaces that can empower the next generation—giving them confidence, the ability to think critically and develop physical literacy that will empower them to navigate this complex world.

**Jeffrey Lindstrom**  
“Play Spaces as an Antidote to our Chaotic World”



Since I fell down the trauma and attachment rabbit hole, one of my favourite words has become homeostasis.

The infographic to the right is about nervous system harmony. I think co-regulation is such an important starting point.


## WHAT IS CO-REGULATION?

A Guide to Nervous System Harmony

### The Role of Co-regulation

Co-regulation is a supportive process where one person helps another manage their emotions, behavior, and physical responses through warm, connected interactions.

This shared experience helps individuals gradually develop self-regulation skills, **making it easier to handle life's challenges on their own.**




### The Science of Co-regulation

The autonomic nervous system is key in regulating our emotional responses.

Co-regulation helps balance our *sympathetic* (“fight or flight”) and *parasympathetic* (“rest and digest”) systems.

**This helps us achieve a state of safety and calm.**



### Why It Matters

Co-regulation fosters a sense of **safety**, especially for people with attachment challenges or trauma backgrounds.


It provides tools to help us understand and regulate our emotions, which supports overall **emotional resilience.**

A regulated client is **better able to engage** in therapeutic activities and learning, and participate in daily life tasks.



### Barriers to Co-regulation and How to Avoid Them

- Provider Dysregulation**  
Use grounding techniques to stay calm when a client is highly dysregulated.
- Sensory Overload**  
Simplify the environment or use soothing sensory tools to ease co-regulation.
- Emotional Escalation**  
Respond to aggressive behavior with empathy and clear boundaries to encourage calm.



My article for this week is an interesting summary of the Top 5 Neurodivergent-Informed Strategies:

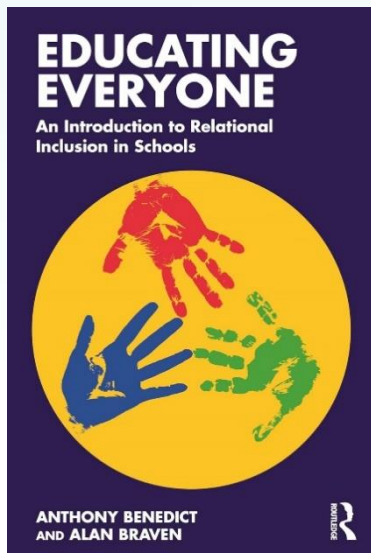
[Top 5 Neurodivergent-Informed Strategies](#)

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 March and is available to pre-order here:



Thanks for reading

Anthony Benedict

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