

Relational Inclusion blog #20: Let your breath be the first word

It's Saturday morning and it seems to be we're having a 'no' day. This isn't a Relational Inclusion term - it's a skill my eldest daughter seems to have mastered to perfection whenever she's dysregulated.

I ask her to do something (and these aren't pointless tasks or even tidy your bedroom tasks) these are functional tasks so we can get to her swimming lesson on time, and the answer is 'no'.

"Can you get dressed now please?"

"No."

"Can you brush your teeth now please?"

"No."

"Can you let go of your brother?"

"No." Closely followed by, "I have."

She hasn't - I'm looking at her. This is then mixed with a good portion of sassiness. I explain that we have to go soon so she really does need to get a wriggle on. She swings her hips and tells me to 'chill'. She's 9.

Now, for once, I do instantly know what's behind this. She is camping out with cubs tonight and she's excited. However, when she's worried or nervous or scared I now know how to help her better, I've no idea why excitement is drawing out the same behaviours.

Hold that thought.

I revert to type (ish) instead of making a threat. The old me definitely would have now threatened that if she didn't get ready now, she wouldn't be camping later. The 'new' me manages to twist this into a more *natural consequence* type conversation: *The more we're delayed now, the more you will be delayed later* type thing.

It doesn't work.

Eventually she gets ready, and we go to her swimming lesson.

Three hours later and the 'no' is back. I've been thinking about the nervous system, and I've worked out adrenaline is adrenaline so that is probably flooding her system hence the behaviour. But I don't seem to have any strategies to draw upon.

I think maybe I should ring my trauma specialist colleague and seek their advice. I've done that A LOT. But I then think she will probably say, "What do you think you need to do?"

And suddenly I know. Because the communication behind the behaviour doesn't matter in terms of the way we should respond to it. The nervous system doesn't separate, it does what it does to protect; to survive. I call my daughter into the kitchen.

"I just want to talk to you." I say. "But I have some jobs to do whilst we talk - is that ok?"

I ask her, "Are you aware of how you're talking and the choices you are making?"

"Yes," she's says and that's a good start.

I say, "This next question might be a tricky one but can you tell me how you are feeling or where you are feeling it?"

She says she is feeling grumpy and tired and excited and worried and lots of different feelings.

"Ah." I say. "Is your tummy like a washing machine with all sorts of different feelings spinning round?" And she smiles and nods.

"Ok." I say, "It's okay to feel like that. And I'm not surprised you do. You have camping later and that's exciting but worrying and a bit out of our usual routine. However - can you see that we maybe need to manage this differently?"

She nods.

I tell her I read something yesterday (which I did) about letting your breath be your first word. There's a flicker of confusion and then her eyes light up.

"You mean take a breath before you speak?"

"Yes," I say. "It sounds interesting. I'm going to try doing that. In fact, I have been but I've not done very well with it. Do you want to try doing that today too?"

She says yes and goes off to play. Let's see how the rest of the day plans out. I think there will be some reminders along the way, but it does feel like we have found a way together.

My first quote, unsurprisingly is the quote about breath:

- 1) *Let your breath be the first word.*

This simple yet profound practice involves taking a deliberate breath before responding in any conversation. By doing this, individuals can anchor themselves, ensuring responses are thoughtful rather than reactive. (Jefferson Fisher)

- 2) *There's no such thing as "tough love". You simply are not emotionally supporting your children. (@annalieserinparentcoach)*

- 3) We are not failing at disciplining our children. We are failing at emotional connection and have done for decades. (@annalieserinparentcoach)
- 4) *The healthiest way a child learns to self-regulate is by co-regulating alongside a trusted parent or caregiver. It takes YEARS to master this skill. Even healthy adults still need to co-regulate alongside other adults sometimes. The young child who SEEMS to be able to consistently quiet their feelings without an adult's help, no matter how BIG those feelings are, hasn't learned to cope – they've learned to shut down.* (Sarah R. Moore)

My two print and stick to the wall images this week are both about co-regulation:

WHAT IS CO-REGULATION?

A Guide to Nervous System Harmony

<h3 style="color: #00897b;">The Role of Co-regulation</h3> <p>Co-regulation is a supportive process where one person helps another manage their emotions, behavior, and physical responses through warm, connected interactions.</p> <p>This shared experience helps individuals gradually develop self-regulation skills, making it easier to handle life's challenges on their own.</p> 	<h3 style="color: #e67e22;">The Science of Co-regulation</h3> <p>The autonomic nervous system is key in regulating our emotional responses.</p> <p>Co-regulation helps balance our <i>sympathetic</i> ("fight or flight") and <i>parasympathetic</i> ("rest and digest") systems.</p> <p>This helps us achieve a state of safety and calm.</p> 
<h3 style="color: #00897b;">Why It Matters</h3> <p>Co-regulation fosters a sense of safety, especially for people with attachment challenges or trauma backgrounds.</p> <p>It provides tools to help us understand and regulate our emotions, which supports overall emotional resilience.</p> <p>A regulated client is better able to engage in therapeutic activities and learning, and participate in daily life tasks.</p> 	<h3 style="color: #e67e22;">Barriers to Co-regulation and How to Avoid Them</h3> <div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column;"> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center;">  <div style="margin-left: 10px;"> <p>Provider Dysregulation</p> <p>Use grounding techniques to stay calm when a client is highly dysregulated.</p> </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center;">  <div style="margin-left: 10px;"> <p>Sensory Overload</p> <p>Simplify the environment or use soothing sensory tools to ease co-regulation.</p> </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center;">  <div style="margin-left: 10px;"> <p>Emotional Escalation</p> <p>Respond to aggressive behavior with empathy and clear boundaries to encourage calm.</p> </div> </div> </div>



Special thanks to Daphne Boucher BA, MScOT, OT Reg.
Visit ulyte.com for more educational resources and to learn more about therapeutic tools for nervous system regulation.

What Is Co-Regulation

(AND WHY IT MATTERS)



Nervous Systems Sync

Co-regulation is when one person's calm helps another feel safe. It's in eye contact, voice tone, body language—not just words.



We Learn It Before Self-Regulation

Kids don't self-soothe—they co-regulate first. Many clients need relational safety before inner calm is possible.



Trauma Disrupts It

For some, closeness feels unsafe. They might pull away, shut down, or test trust. Therapy helps repair that wiring.



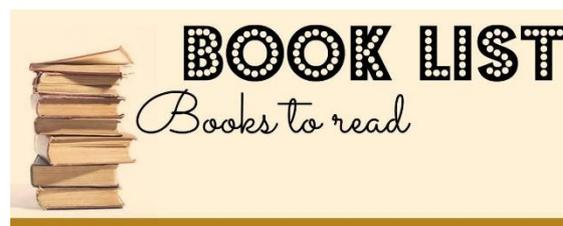
Therapists Need It Too

You deserve support that calms your system. Supervision, peers, and real connection matter.

@therapywisdom

My recommended read this week is another 'watch' about current issues in ACEs research:

[Current issues in ACEs research](#)

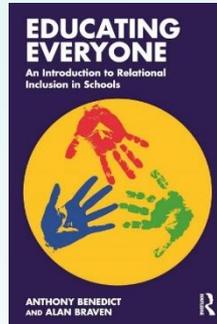


This week, oddly enough, I want to recommend a book I've not actually read yet. I heard about it on the radio, then it came up in conversation with a colleague on the way to Edinburgh last week, and as we walked past a book shop, there it was, proudly displayed in the window. Incidentally, it's also where the quote 'let your breath be the first word' comes from. The book is: *The Next Conversation- Argue Less, Talk More* by Jefferson Fisher. If you read it before me, let me know what you make of it!

If you have read any interesting books which support / develop / further understanding of all things relational inclusion, please add a comment through Substack.

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

Our book, *Educating Everyone: An Introduction to relational Inclusion in Schools* is out now and you must buy it and tell everyone else to buy it. It is available pretty much everywhere that sells books or you can get it here:



You can subscribe to my weekly blog here:

https://open.substack.com/pub/anthonybenedict/p/relational-inclusion-blog-15?r=5ki35n&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web&showWelcomeOnShare=true

Our third book study takes place on 26th June 4-5.30pm. If you would like to join us, tickets are free but limited. We will be discussing chapters 3-6. You can book through our website: [Educating Everyone – Book Study Session 3 – Ambition Community Trust \(ACT\)](#)

Finally, I'd like to share a quote which has really stuck in my mind:

5) Anything that could go wrong could also go right

Thanks for reading

Anthony Benedict

CEO Ambition Community Trust