

Relational Inclusion blog #22: The Hornets' Nest

I've been thinking about friendships and how these develop both in children and adults.

This week all three of my children have struggled with their friendships. I think it's probably a mix it being nearly the end of the school year; the hot weather and ultimately the fact that friendships are hard and complex to make and sustain. It's a weird landscape to navigate and there aren't really any rules. Or the rules you think are working suddenly don't - especially when you are 4, 7 and 9, but I guess it applies to adulthood as well.

Now this is my back of a fag packet philosophy. Somewhere along the way I once read about the dynamics between how boys' friendship groups and girls' friendship groups develop. I think we're talking primary school age. (I have since checked with chat GP and it isn't a figment of my imagination). I am more than aware that not everyone fits this model or pattern, but I do think it's an interesting concept. Equally I'm not sure how much we apply this when working with children and young people and we probably should at least take it into consideration.

What it suggests is that boys tend to play in groups. Their play tends to be more competitive and there are usually fairly clearly defined roles within the group. (For my 4-year-old boy everything is about being the biggest, the strongest; the fastest and first).

Often there will be the tough one; the clever one; the funny one; the soft one; the wild one; the fast one (maybe this is what my little boy is practising - I think maybe the *pack* friendship possibly kicks in just before adolescence). There is often a tall one, a small one and a tubby one in the group.

Generally, everyone knows their place and things work fine as long as everyone stays in their place and no-one new arrives. New arrivals must find their place, and this can sometimes threaten someone's existing place. Usually this will lead to some kind of fight (I avoid saying fisticuffs although I desperately wanted to and now I have). The matter is resolved. The deck is reshuffled, and they get on with it. Boy talk is also generally about strength and speed and fighting and risk or danger

For girls this seems to work differently. Girls appear to work in smaller groups: predominantly 2s or 3s. Again, as I dust down the cobwebs of my memory, the reason for this is because girls' relationships are much more emotionally based. By this I mean they invest their time in talking about their feelings. This makes the investment higher but higher investment means greater risk. First of all, in a three, there is always the chance that one of the three will feel more 'left out' than the other two. This may be real or perceived but as we know from trauma - if it feels real, then to some extent it is real.

The other risk is that if you share and invest all your feelings with one (or two) other people and then are rejected by your small group - you're in a bit of a pickle. Your nearest and dearest might not feel so near and dear anymore but they also hold your heart. They know

all your deepest darkest secrets and also hold in their hands your fears and dreams. And that leaves you vulnerable.

Now someone far cleverer than me will have researched this and studied it - possibly debunked or validated it. But I feel there is some truth in it. Especially if observing my own children is anything to go by. If this is the case - first of all, are we, as adults, aware of this in our own relationships and interactions and secondly are we watching this in our playgrounds and classrooms? As we know, behind all behaviour is communication.

And if this delicate balance of dancing with friendship is taking place during every interaction (and social media space) and spilling into the classroom- how closely are we as grown-ups paying attention to the detail?

Feelings escalate quickly and the children don't even know the words for some of those emotions. Most of them (all?) don't know the rules of the game they are playing and when the game goes well it doesn't matter so much -

But when it goes wrong ...

And then add hot weather; the end of term; a broken arm; a new arrival - and well, why are we surprised when seemingly out of nowhere the hornets' nest has been well and truly stirred.

A lot of work and study has taken place around how children play. There is an argument that play is everything. Shouldn't we be encouraging and observing play before we even think about teaching? But shouldn't we also be mindful of what play is doing and the impact it can have on- especially in terms of social inclusion and exclusion.

Is there a lesson here? if girls are sharing feelings and then having them (or perceiving them) to be used against them, is there some work to be done around developing kindness? And in boys, are feelings repressed, or do they just not 'need' them at their stage of development? I wonder if this is all originated with our survival needs when we were hunter gatherers.

Whatever the origin, this is playing out in our playgrounds and classrooms and gardens and living rooms and maybe we need to pay better attention. It might even teach us something about our own behaviours as adults.

My first two quotes this week reflects some thinking about play:

- 1) *Play is not a precursor to learning; It is learning in its most natural, focused and meaningful form.* (Sally Haughey)
- 2) *You can't test what play teaches.*



*The most important things children learn through play can't be captured on a test.
You can't score a child's ability to navigate uncertainty.
You can't quantify curiosity, or creativity, or courage.
There's no standardized measure for how they solve a conflict on their own,
negotiate a tricky structure, or recover from a failure.
Play builds the stuff life actually demands - flexibility, resilience, communication,
imagination, emotional strength. The very things that fuel learning, relationships,
and growth.
And that's why protecting play matters so much.
Because the richest learning is too deep, too complex, too human to be boxed up,
graded, or compared. (Rooted in play)*

My next quotes are about not beating yourself up:

3) *Win the day and go on your way.*

There are always doubts:

- *But what if ...*
- *Will I be able to*
- *Should I be worried about ...*

Leave it be. Have the best day you can today. Win the moment in front of you right now. (James Clear)

4) *Let the version of yourself that you were, teach you. Let the version of yourself that you are currently, comfort you. Let the version of yourself that you are becoming, inspire you. You are the version that you need and needed to be in every phase of the journey. (Unknown)*

5) *Be kind to the version of you that had no clue what they were doing.*

That version survived, so this next version could thrive.

Keep going. (Jeff Moore)

6) *A person turns 30 and they're "old".*

A person dies at 30 and they're "young".

This is the world we live in.

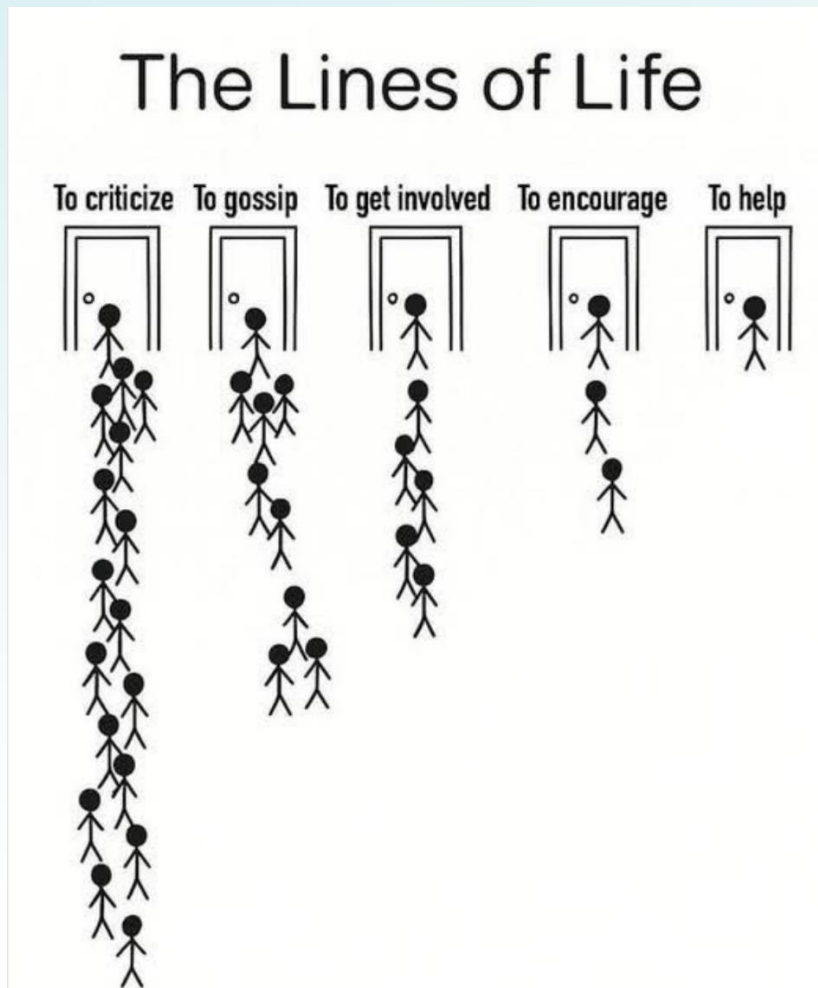
Run your own race. Because no matter what you do, people will judge you through the lens of their own fears. Their timelines are not your timeline. Their definition of "too late" doesn't apply to you.

You're not behind. You're not ahead.

You're exactly where you're supposed to be. (Unknown)

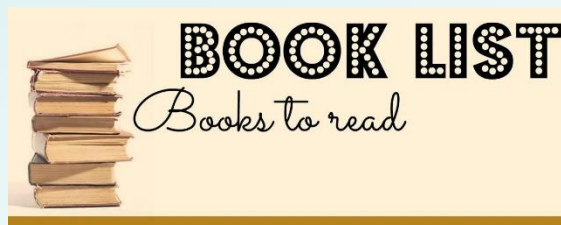


My two print and stick to the wall images this week are:



My recommended read is called exclusion does hurt

[Managing with the Brain in Mind](#)



This week's 'book off my shelf' is a book that will always be important to me as it was the first book I read when I began my journey down the trauma and attachment rabbit hole. It's called 'Know Me To Teach Me' by Louise Michelle Bomber and it literally opened my eyes to this new way of understanding.

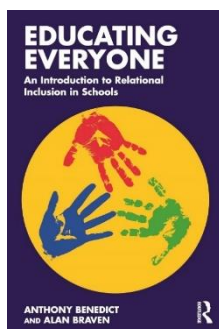
I opened it randomly (honestly I did) and found whatever I had highlighted to share:

What's important to consider is how our traumatised pupils can be helped to stay grounded in the face of intense sensations associated with the body and mind's fear responses and being triggered again, and more so, in the future. That's one of the focal points of this book, written to help you free the particular children and young people you work with to function in all areas of their lives, despite everything they've lived through, and the severe consequences of these disturbed situations, which were outside of their control. And to support us to understand the need to use differentiated discipline because of their fragile sense of self, poor internal controls and faulty neuroception.

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

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

7) *You can't give your life more time. So give the time you have more life*
(business mindset101)

Thanks for reading

Anthony Benedict

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