

Relational Inclusion blog #31: The Power Cycle

On Saturday mornings my daughters have swimming lessons. Slowly I've tried to train them to pack their own things. This is a slow process, and it doesn't always work. Up until recently they got their clothes ready, and I would pack their knickers. This seemed a bit ridiculous, so we have worked on them packing their own knickers. Is this developing independence? Who knows. But getting three children dressed and ready and out on time and remembering hot water bottles and hot chocolate and towels and goggles and ear plugs - well maybe knickers are just one less thing to remember.

Or not.

The swimming lesson had been completed. Both girls were wrapped in their towels. Hot chocolate had been poured.

Then daughter number one asks, 'Did you pack my knickers?'

'Er no. That's your job.'

The situation possibly wasn't helped by daughter number two - younger- who had packed her own knickers.

Now. We live a five-minute car ride from the pool. This shouldn't be the end of the world. Except that of course today it is.

"I don't pack your knickers anymore. That's your job." I repeat.

To be fair I've been in such a rush I can't actually remember whose job it was. I'm pretty sure it is her job. Afterall she is nearly 10 and probably can manage to remember to pack her own knickers.

Equally I have forgotten to pack them in the past. And maybe I should have done a final check- which clearly, I didn't. We are where we are. This is also an opportunity to practice what I preach. Except skilfully I manage to avoid that and revert to type.

"It's your job," I repeat, which was probably unnecessary. Very kindly, daughter number one kicks my hand in temper.

Step forward parent-child stand-off.

I am cross that this has become a problem. I am cross because the swimming pool changing rooms are always uncomfortably warm. I am cross because I know what's coming next. And I suppose I am cross because I am only human. I am also cross because we have worked a lot on our feelings and lashing out and kicking. We have talked and talked about this.

I do know that just because we have talked and talked this hasn't necessarily sunk into her 10-year-old brain. Changing habits takes time and effort. It takes patience practice for a child to manage their emotional and physical responses. I'm just not particularly wanting to think about that right now.

I slip into old fashioned parenting mode.

"It is not ok to kick. You know this is not ok. You are in a lot of trouble young lady. We will talk about this later."

Now what I do know, is when my daughter is in this position, or any child for that matter, they are unlikely to say *I'm sorry daddy. I made a mistake. I won't do it again. I shouldn't have kicked you; I was frustrated with myself.* They are even less likely to reflect when idle or real punitive threats are made. What they are likely to do is get out their stubborn shovel and dig themselves in deeper.

Which she dutifully did. To the point where she then refused to put any bottoms on at all.

"I don't like getting dressed without knickers," she says and refuses to do anything.

At this point my mum chips in. I know what my mum is trying to do, and I know she is trying to help. But her input doesn't help my ever-narrowing window of tolerance at all and adults pulling in different directions can add to escalation.

"Put your trousers on and when you have, I'll tell you a secret about knickers."

I know it's a grandma deflection tactic, but I don't want that at this point. I want my daughter not to kick out when she is cross. (I'm genuinely concerned my daughter will do this to the wrong person one day and get hit back. Hard). I want my daughter to put her trousers on. In fact, I'm in 'I want my daughter to do what I want because' mode.

The situation is obviously ridiculous and totally unnecessary and I'm not making it any better. Eventually - after plenty of silly threats on my part- I calm myself down and talk to her nervous system instead of aggravating my own.

I explain that I do understand - and it is a new rule and I'm sorry she forgot her knickers, and I should have checked, and I know it must be uncomfortable, and I use all the well-rehearsed lines that I should have used ten minutes ago. It's not rocket science after all, and once I stop winding up the situation we manage to get in the car and home.

Oddly this wasn't what I was going to write about that this week. It felt a bit like *I got cross with my kids again* but then *The Power Cycle* came up on my social media feed (included below) and I thought this is exactly what I need to write about. I didn't know it was called the power cycle and like all things *relational inclusion*, it makes perfect sense. We continue

to learn. For me, stepping out of the cycle means remembering that being human is messy, but repair is what matters.

The Power Cycle

The Power Cycle explains why conflicts between adults and young people can escalate so quickly.

A child feels powerless – maybe they're overwhelmed, anxious, or struggling to communicate. Their behaviour becomes challenging, which can feel threatening or disrespectful to the adult. The adult then responds with more control – raising their voice, issuing consequences, or pushing harder for compliance.

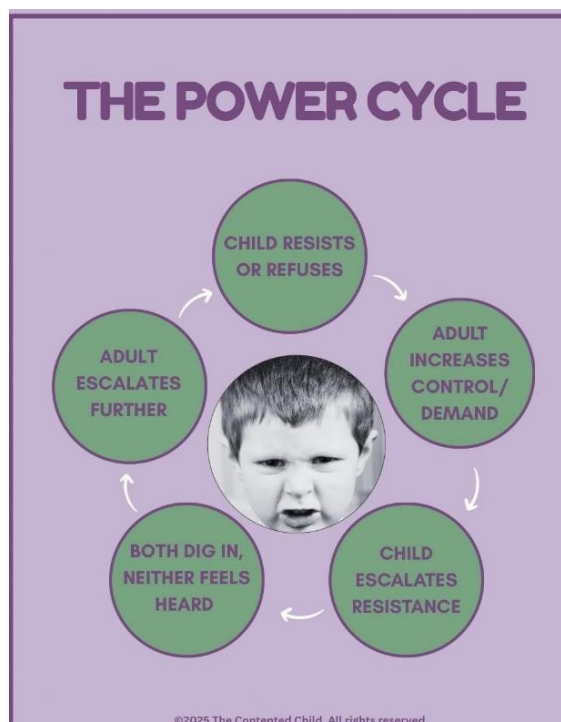
This fuels the child's sense of powerlessness, so their behaviour escalates further. Round and round it goes, each side feeding the other.

Here's the truth: the cycle can only break when one person steps out. Children don't yet have the skills to do this consistently – so it's the adult who must pause, soften, and lead with connection.

When we choose calm, validation, and safety over control, we show young people that they are not powerless. We model regulation, repair trust, and open the door for cooperation.

Understanding the cycle helps us see that challenging behaviour isn't about "winning" or "losing power" – it's about unmet needs, developing skills, and the chance to teach without shame.

What helps you step out of the power cycle when tensions rise?
(From the Contented Child)





My one a day quotes for this week are:

- 1) *The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said.*
Peter Drucker
- 2) *When we take the perspective that our child is truly doing the best that they can with the brain development that they have, we have more patience, empathy and understanding.* (@wildflowerparenting - inside parenting)
- 3) *Stop trying to perfect your child, but keep trying to perfect your relationship with them.* (Dr. Henker GENERATION MINDFUL)
- 4) *Our kids can't learn to tolerate feelings we don't tolerate in them.* (Dr.Becky)
- 5) *When a child can't calm down they need connection and comfort, not criticism and control.* (Jane Evans)
- 6) *All children behave as well as they are treated.* (Jan Hunt KJ Althoff @gentlehealingmom)
- 7) *My partner teacher does this lovely thing when a student in his class gives him an 'I don't know' response. He simply says, 'Tell me something you do know that might be helpful.'*
(TOM BRASSINGTON, Teacher)



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



You can't stop the rain, but you
can carry an **umbrella**.



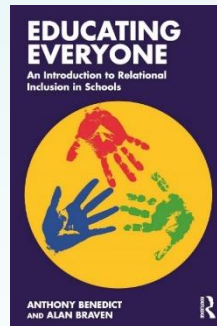
Preparation beats **complaining**.

@HassanSasBanguraBlog

My recommended read is about understanding dishonest harmony: [Understanding Dishonest Harmony | Family Therapy Barrie | VOX Mental Health](#)The

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:



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

8) Your past isn't your future.

Let your past follow you,

Not lead you (@HassanSasBanguarBlog)

Thanks for reading

Anthony Benedict

CEO Ambition Community Trust