

Relational Inclusion blog #32: Let Kids be Kids

On Wednesday I got an email from my daughter's school telling me that she'd had a minor accident and had a bump on her lip but was fine to stay in school. When I collected her at the end of the day, I was mildly surprised that someone had swapped her mouth with Marge Simpson's. Other than that, she was fine. She'd been in a PE lesson and she and another boy (smaller than her, she was proud to explain) had run into each other and because he was 'smaller' his head had hit her lip.

Now my daughter does like to complain. A scratch to her was a gaping wound needing urgent medical attention. I imagine she'd make a fuss about a broken eyelash. This always reminds me of my dad because he loved a good complain. I always cringed a bit when someone, in social situations, asked how he was (and maybe there is something here in social etiquette and the accompanying questions and answers — do we really mean what we say, or care about the answer?). If you ever asked how my dad was, you'd need to be prepared for a long and detailed description of his medical conditions and would probably be best bringing your own chair.

My daughter's friend came round after tea, and from the snippets of conversation I gathered, there was a lot of discussion about her lip. In her shower before bed, she talked to me for twenty minutes non-stop about — guess what ... her lip.

Amid all the fuss about her lip, my wife and I also noticed something else emerging — a new talent for adding bits to stories, making things up and, dare I say, blatantly lying.

In between complaining about her lip, she'd come in from the garden with her friend and announced that she'd saved the cat. She was very pleased with herself. We have an indoor cat, who every now and then sneaks outside. This usually goes unnoticed by everyone except me and then I have a minor panic trying to find her.

Unusually, on this occasion, not only had my daughter noticed but she'd bothered to retrieve the cat and bring her back inside. However, by the second telling, the story had become more dramatic. The cat was now high up on a fence and somehow, she'd managed to bring her down.

Except none of this was true. My cat is 15. Her back legs aren't what they used to be, and her fence- and tree-climbing days are well and truly over. When challenged about whether the cat was actually on a fence or not, our daughter eventually conceded the cat was 'sort of looking at the fence as if she might climb it.'

Now we had two issues to manage (albeit minor in the grand scheme of things): twisting the truth to a point where it's not true and moaning endlessly about injuries that really aren't worth moaning endlessly about.

As is a parent's want, we began to discuss and diagnose and dissect... Lying and complaining could well be our child communicating a sense of need. Is she not feeling seen or heard or noticed? Are these symptoms of something else more significant?

We talked to her about the boy who cried wolf. We talked to her about appropriate discussion and the length of time she talked to her friends about how much things hurt. For the next twenty-four hours I found myself stuck in hyper-vigilant spot the "lie and (fake) pain" mode.

The next day she started explaining something about a conversation we'd had maybe half an hour earlier. Again, I noticed that she was adding details, and I explained that I had actually been there at the time and those things just didn't happen. Hadn't she listened to or understood anything we'd said about telling lies?

Then my other daughter decided very politely to chirp in.

"Excuse me daddy."

I stopped mid-flow.

"But I just want to say I did hear her say those things, even if you didn't."

And I had to stop myself and reflect.

Let kids be kids.

Be curious.

Repair and model when necessary.

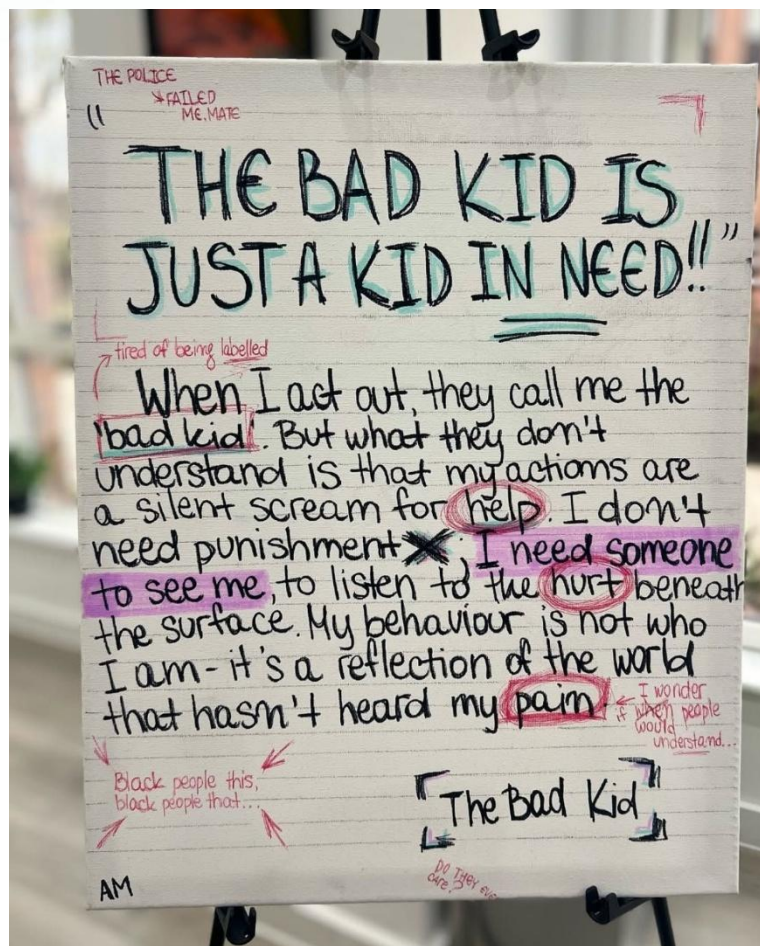
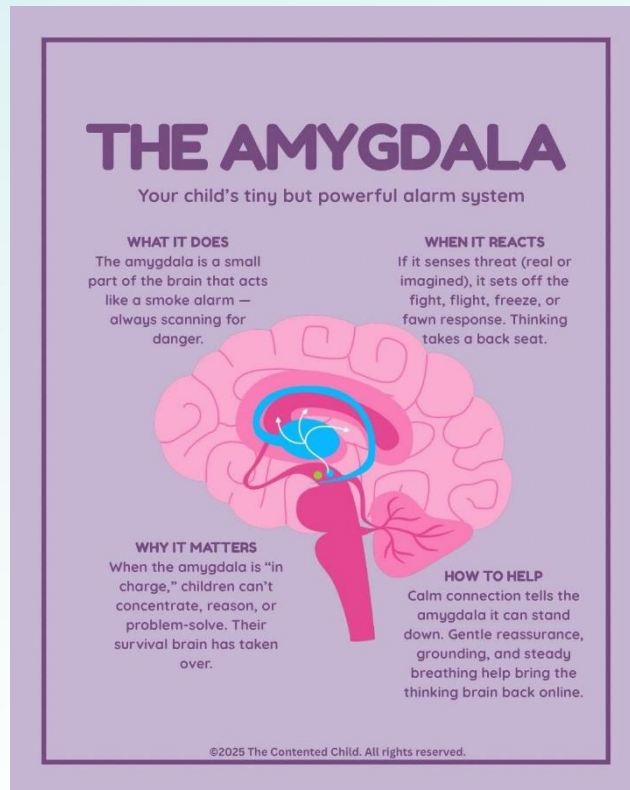
Our lives are so busy and there are so many moving parts at so many different levels that it becomes easy to slip into trying to find a silver bullet or a solution. But there aren't really any silver bullets or quick fix solutions. Relational Inclusion is about being curious so that we can better understand our own world and the world our children inhabit. But we must see this through their eyes, not ours. Every moment is not an emotion-coaching moment – it's ok to get it wrong — and this must be applied to ourselves before we even consider its application to those around us. I'm not a therapist or a counsellor, and every action doesn't uncover some deep-rooted trauma-based issue. Relational inclusion is about relationships and valuing everyone's seat at the table, not controlling their chairs.



My one-a-day quotes for this week are:

- 1) *EXCLUSION IS NOT A NEUTRAL ACT-IT SENDS A MESSAGE: YOU DON'T BELONG.*
When students are removed from classrooms, they receive the message that they're "too much" or "not enough." This damages self-concept and often intensifies behaviour. (unknown)
- 2) *When your child is being "dramatic," remember their emotional scale is different. What feels small to you, feels big to them.*
Validate their feeling, not the size of the problem. This builds emotional trust.
(Arsalan Moin @psychtreatment)
- 3) *Zulu Proverb*
The same boiling water that softens the potato hardens the egg.
Meaning:
Similar experiences can impact people in different ways. Avoid judging someone else's circumstances just because you navigated through a similar situation successfully. (© FB/BuddhismPageFB)
- 4) *Being ready is a myth.*
You start. You suck.
You figure it out.
You get better. (unknown)
- 5) *How you respond to your child's upset teaches them how to respond to the upset of others. (@ ConsciousDiscipline®)*
- 6) *The hard reality is that if your child only obeys you when you threaten consequences, they do not value your influence or trust your wisdom.*
They simply fear getting in trouble. (inside parenting)
- 7) *Allowing a student with a hidden disability (ADHD, Anxiety, Dyslexia) to struggle academically or socially when all that is needed for success are appropriate accommodations and explicit instruction, is no different than failing to provide a ramp for a person in a wheelchair. (Unknown)*

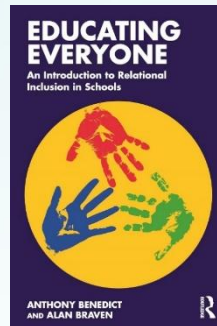
My two print and stick to the wall images this week are:



My recommended read is about positive discipline: [Positive Discipline Implementation in Primary School in Egypt](#)

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 future needs you.
Your past doesn't. (Unknown)*

Thanks for reading

Anthony Benedict

CEO Ambition Community Trust