

Relational Inclusion blog #36: Feeding the Need

Our house isn't quite busy enough, so a few weeks ago we decided to throw a dog into the mix.

I'm not going to explain the process — that's a whole blog in itself. We now have Vinny, a retired racing greyhound. The behaviours he's displayed as he's adapted to living with our family could fill another post entirely, but what I want to talk about this week is his appetite.

Vinny is lean, and where he isn't lean there is muscle. He can run at forty-five miles an hour and there isn't an ounce of fat on him (yet). But food — or even the smell of it — takes total control of him. He can't think or focus on anything else. His nose is on the worktop, in the butter; leave a bowl of anything lying around for a nanosecond and he's on it.

He's well fed and eats regularly, so we know he isn't hungry. Which led me to wonder what exactly is going on.

We know a dog's sense of smell is much keener and far sharper than a human's but surely scent alone can't send him into such a frenzy. His behaviour reminds me of a child's attachment pattern — where all focus narrows to one thing. With a child, it might be connection or attention. With Vinny, it's food.

At first, I assumed he was just greedy. But curiosity got the better of me, so I checked in with my good friend ChatGPT:

Ah, the eternal question of the bottomless greyhound.

Greyhounds often seem greedy, but it's rarely greed in the human sense. It's a mix of biology, habit, and history — shaped by racing life, fast metabolism, and food scarcity. In kennels, food wasn't a leisurely affair; it was competition. Eat fast or lose out. That sense of urgency doesn't just disappear.

Many ex-racers have also experienced underfed or inconsistent periods in their past — times when food was limited, or the environment was too chaotic to trust it would come. Even years later, their bodies remember that uncertainty. So, when food appears, the instinct isn't indulgence; it's survival.

So, what looks like greed is really survival instincts wrapped in a sleek, lazy body.

That idea of competing for food — or never knowing when it might come — really struck a chord with me. Last week, a friend was explaining the difference between *eating disorders* and *disordered eating*.

In a nutshell, an eating disorder is a clinically diagnosable mental health condition such as anorexia or bulimia, often linked to a distorted sense of body image.

Disordered eating, on the other hand, refers to irregular or unhealthy eating behaviours that might stem from trauma, neglect, or instability.

Children who aren't fed regularly, or who grow up in environments where food is uncertain, tend to eat as much as they can when it's available — because they don't know when the next meal is coming. That pattern can continue into adulthood, long after the hunger or scarcity has gone.

A good friend of mine, who lived through childhood trauma and neglect, spent much of his early life either starving through poverty or abuse. He stands at 5 foot 11, and at his heaviest weighed 28 stone. "It's inside me," he told me. "That hunger — it's in there. When food's around, something in me still says eat it now, just in case."

In *The Deepest Well*, Dr. Nadine Burke Harris explains how early trauma can quite literally reshape the body. When a child lives in a state of constant stress or uncertainty, the body's alarm system stays switched on. Hormones like cortisol and adrenaline flood the system, preparing the body for fight or flight — even when there's no immediate danger. Over time, that survival system starts working against them: appetite increases, fat is stored more quickly, and the body learns to hold on to what it can, just in case.

Food becomes comfort, safety — a way to quiet the body's alarm. What looks like greed or lack of control is often a body remembering scarcity, doing exactly what it was trained to do to survive.

So where does this fit with *Relational Inclusion* — aside from the fact that I may now have a greyhound with disordered eating?

What I'm reminded of again is how important it is to find the source rather than just treat the symptoms. How we are treated, and how we treat others — animals included — shapes behaviour. It's made me think about our relationship with food, how complex it is, and how quickly we judge without truly knowing what's going quite literally under the skin.

Sometimes, in trying to protect itself, the body becomes maladaptive — doing its best to help, even as it works against us. And maybe the same is true of behaviour in general: beneath the surface, there's always a reason, if we are just curious enough to look.

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

- 1) *Dysregulation is like a traffic jam in the brain - nothing, not even reason or rewards, can get through until the roads are cleared.* (@The_Therapist_Parent)
- 2) *You can't consequence a child out of survival mode.
But you CAN co regulate them back to safety.* (The regulated classroom)
- 3) *Inclusion is just like a big hug that says you are welcome here, just as you are.*
(Diversity kids)
- 4) *Children don't just witness conflict they absorb it.
And it shapes how they'll one day handle love, anger, and belonging.*
(@artofparenteen)
- 5) *There are only two days in the year that nothing can be done. One is called Yesterday
and the other is called Tomorrow. Today is the right day to Love, Believe, Do and
mostly Live.* (BuddhismPageFB)
- 6) *Your kids will either inherit your trauma or your transformation.
Choose wisely. Because you will transmit what you do not transform.*
(@dadnationco. INSIDE PARENTING)
- 7) *I think kids are the life coaches we never knew we needed.*
(@raising-yourself. INSIDE PARENTING)

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



HIDDEN SIGNS OF A TRIGGERED BRAIN

~the child who masks

NOT EVERY TRIGGERED BRAIN
LOOKS EXPLOSIVE.
SOME CHILDREN GO QUIET, STILL,
AND OVER-CONTROLLED.

THEIR NERVOUS SYSTEM MAY BE
IN FIGHT, FLIGHT, FREEZE, FAWN
OR FLOP –
BUT THEY'VE LEARNED TO MASK
IT BEHIND A CALM FACE.

YOU MIGHT SEE COMPLIANCE,
PERFECTIONISM, OR
PEOPLE-PLEASING.

UNDERNEATH, THEIR BRAIN IS
WORKING HARD TO STAY SAFE.

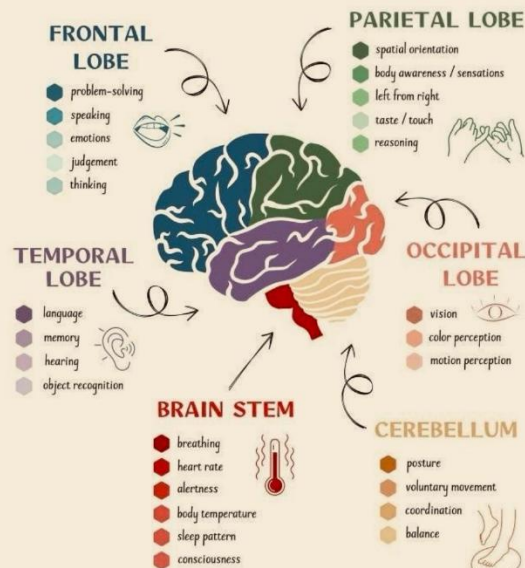
A CALM-LOOKING CHILD ISN'T
ALWAYS A CALM-FEELING CHILD.
LOOK BEYOND BEHAVIOUR –
NOTICE THE TENSION, THE
WITHDRAWAL, THE EFFORT TO
HOLD IT TOGETHER.

UNDERSTANDING WHAT'S HIDDEN HELPS US SUPPORT WHAT'S REAL.
MASKING, THE TOOLKIT FOR PARENTS AND EDUCATORS
- LINK IN COMMENTS OR VIA OUR LINKTREE SHOP

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THE MIND-BODY Connection

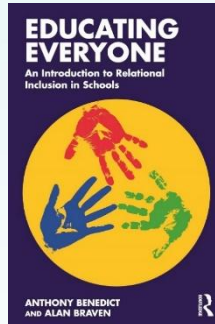
Understand your brain to understand your body



My recommended read is about why: [Four-year-olds don't need to sit still to be 'school ready'](#)

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:

How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives. (Annie Dillard)

Thanks for reading

Anthony Benedict

CEO Ambition Community Trust