

## Relational Inclusion blog #36: Kid in the Cupboard

My mum has been reading *The Witches* to my daughters. I'm not quite sure why. They tried the film a year or so ago and it terrified them. On Sunday morning she messaged me to say the film was on at 3:15 that afternoon.

To be fair, my first thought was who on earth watches anything on live TV anymore? Maybe I should have been thinking more about how scared they were last time. But before I'd even had that thought, I was telling them it was on that afternoon.

Then I forgot about it. Usually, they would have too. I should have read the omens better. Children have a sixth sense (pun intended) when it comes to remembering the things you'd rather they didn't. Ask them to remember anything else — brushing their teeth, putting clothes away — and they're hopeless.

Usually oblivious to time, daughter number one suddenly chirps up, "What time's *The Witches* on?"

And so it seems we're having a movie afternoon.

I remind her how scary she found it last time, how it gave her bad dreams, how we both know these things prey on her mind.

"That was years ago — I was only seven or something then. I'm nearly ten now. I'll be fine."

She believes this, even if I remain sceptical. The recommended age is 8+, so we take the chance they'll both be okay.

At 3 p.m., both daughters have set up camp in front of the kitchen TV. They have no idea how television that isn't Netflix, Disney or YouTube works, so I show them how to find the channel. I vaguely notice it's the new version, which I haven't seen. I'm not even sure I knew there was a new version.

After fifteen minutes, daughter number two has decided it's too scary. There's a scene where the grandma tells a story about her childhood friend being turned into a chicken. That's enough to frighten her off. She disappears to do something else.

Daughter number one perseveres. About halfway through, my little boy decides he wants to watch too, but we're reasonably sure he's scared of the dark, so we manage to distract him.

And that's it — until bedtime.

As usual, I take daughter number two up first. She clings to me tighter than usual. "I'm scared of the witches," she says.

We've already discussed that it's just a silly story, that someone made it up — there's no point revisiting it. Luckily my little boy goes down unusually early so my wife is on hand to help. She settles daughter number two. I bring daughter number one to bed.

She's scared too. I have to stand by the door and keep it open as she goes to the toilet. With a different bedtime story and a promise to check on her soon, she finally seems to settle.

By the time I get back from walking the dog, daughter number two is crying again. I suggest she sleeps in the *family bedroom* with my wife which means I'm sleeping in the basement.

By the time I'm ready for bed, daughter number one is awake. Both my daughters have a knack of appearing silently, out of nowhere, when they should be asleep, like one of the twins from *The Shining*. It always makes me jump.

"I just keep on scaring myself," she says.

So she sleeps in the basement with me. The children sleep fine. My wife and I don't. We thought we were past the musical-beds stage of parenting.

Now I can remember being scared of the dark and of monsters as a child. I can remember my mum leaving my room after she put me to bed. I used to count her footsteps as she went down the stairs until I knew I was truly alone. Then I'd cling desperately to my sheets and hide under them (though why I ever thought a sheet offered any protection I'll never know!).

I can remember how scary upstairs felt once it got dark. The thought of The Child Catcher from *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* terrified my sister for months. I can also remember my mum reading me a famous five story about smugglers. It terrified me. I can still hear the mysterious tap tap tapping echoing through the dark caves. Come to think of it, there's a common denominator here — maybe my mum is the problem, just like the grandma in *Witches*.

In all seriousness, I guess that's tolerable stress. Perfectly normal — as long as there's a safe adult nearby.

But it did make me think of the children who don't have that.

A friend of mine was locked under the stairs — in the pitch black — as punishment, for hours on end. Some children live in constant fear: of violence, neglect, starvation, or poverty. They can't name those things while they're happening, but their bodies remember. The toxic stress they experience is unimaginable to anyone who hasn't lived it.

And yet, these are the children we isolate in school. The ones described in the press as *unteachable, unmanageable, not school ready*. The ones some people say need *stricter discipline*.

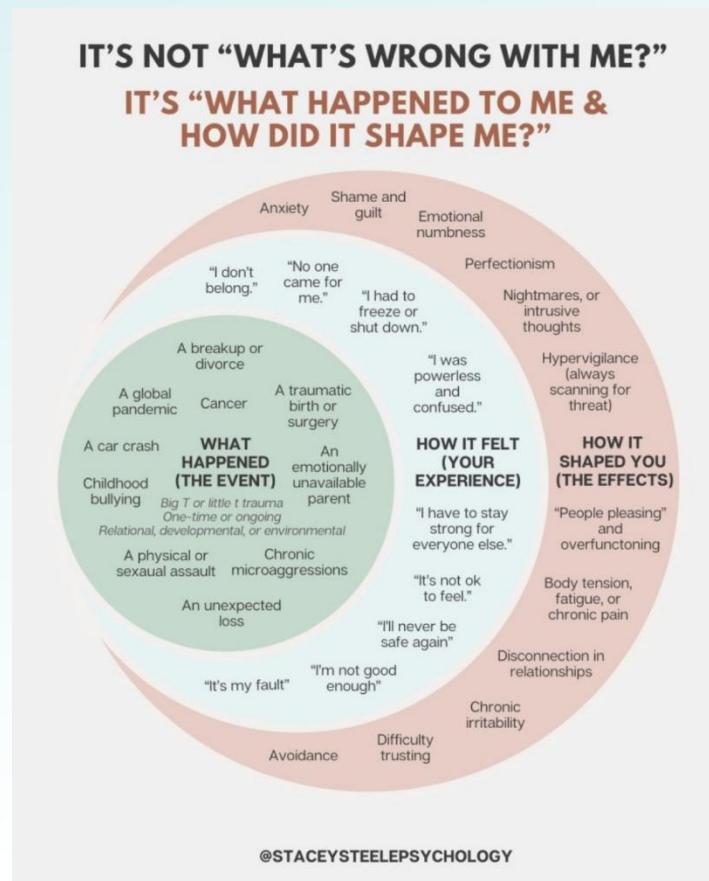
And I wonder — if that was your experience of home life, could you sit still in class? Could you concentrate? Would you be in any position to access your social engagement state and 'learn' your lessons. Or might that be the last thing on your mind and the last thing your body and nervous system needed?

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

- 1) *If we want different behaviour, we must offer better tools —not just stronger consequences.* (unknown)
- 2) *Rules without relationship create rebellion.*  
*Connection gives correction a heartbeat-it turns discipline into guidance, not fear. A child who feels loved learns to listen, not to obey, but to understand.*  
(@artofparenteen)
- 3) *When we respond with calm, we lend our nervous system to a child who's lost theirs.*  
(Niki Green, the contented child)
- 4) *In my years as a principal in the public system, I saw how much energy leaders wasted trying to force growth through compliance.*  
*It's like trying to make a tree grow by shouting at it.*  
(L. Slanzi)
- 5) *Every difficult conversation with our children is a doorway - and the way we respond decides whether it opens wider, or closes shut.* (Inside Parenting)
- 6) *I call children our "awakeners".*  
*Because they are here to mirror us. All our broken, incomplete little pieces... We realize as we raise them...*  
*It is they who raise us into wholeness* (Shafti)
- 7) *"When we see misbehaviour as stress behaviour, everything changes."*  
(Dr. Stuart Shanker)



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



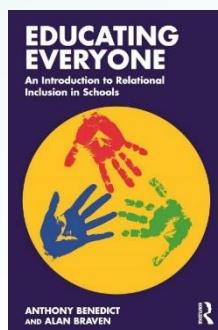
My recommended reads are, not surprisingly, about isolation rooms:

[One in 12 secondary pupils put in isolation rooms at least once a week, study finds | Schools | The Guardian](#)

['Publicly humiliated': parents describe difficulty of children's isolation at school | Schools | The Guardian](#)

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:

*Admit it – you never open a wardrobe without secretly hoping to find Narnia (unknown)*

Thanks for reading

Anthony Benedict

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