

Relational Inclusion blog #40: On Being 10

You might remember I mentioned my eldest daughter's birthday was fast approaching — and that she was probably the most excited anyone has been since birthdays were invented. In all fairness, it was her tenth birthday. And on reflection, being ten is a pretty big thing. It's double figures. Something definitely changes. To some extent, sadly — or excitingly — you get a sense of what it is to be a bit more grown up.

On the eve of her birthday, had she been a cartoon character, she would have glowed in the dark. As I read her bedtime story she was shaking and grinning and laughing with pure delight at the prospect of what tomorrow would bring.

We followed our usual routine, I kissed her goodnight, reinforced our clear instructions that she's not to get up before 6, then went downstairs, got changed, and got ready to walk the dog. As I was about to leave the house, she appeared at the top of the stairs.

"It's just my throat is really dry and I need a drink. Will you bring me a glass of water after you've walked the dog?"

"Go back to bed, sweetie. You're just excited."

And I left.

Then I felt mean and wondered if I should have just got her the water. Equally, the dog was getting a bit giddy about his walk, and I didn't fancy making him wait and then cleaning up his wee because he'd got too excited. And then I worried I'd chosen the dog over my child. I pushed the nonsense thinking away and walked the dog.

Roughly an hour later I headed up to bed. I heard someone on the landing.

"I just really need the toilet, Daddy," she explained in her hyper-excited voice.

Another hour passed and I was asleep. My daughter appeared in our bedroom. Luckily, it was my wife's night to get up — she definitely got the short straw. She put daughter number one back in bed.

Maybe another hour later and I heard:

"It's just my tummy feels a bit funny."

And my wife replying, "You're just excited."

I drifted back to sleep.

The pattern repeated ALL night.

Somewhere between 4 and 5 I heard her in the toilet again. And my eldest isn't the quietest. Which isn't great. As I've also described previously, this can trigger the cat and dog dawn chorus. Which, of course, it did. The dog started whimpering. After maybe ten minutes the cat started yowling, which usually means the dog has already weed on the floor.

Daughter reappeared.

"I can't sleep because the dog is whining."

I resisted the urge to blame — because what I wanted to say was: *Of course the bloody dog is whining. You've been up every hour, you've clattered into the bathroom and woken the dog up who now thinks it's time for his walk.*

I didn't.

My wife got up to walk the dog. My daughter got in bed with me, and I pretended that I was actually going to get some sleep. She checked the clock every few minutes until eventually it was 6am and we got up to open her presents.

That evening my wife said to me, "You know our eldest... she feels all her emotions but turned up to 10."

I thought of Spinal Tap going to 11, but the reference would be wasted.

However, it did get me thinking. My eldest, more than my other two, does seem to have BIG feelings. As I've said, she's been fizzing for weeks about her birthday. When she comes back from Cubs, she's absolutely beside herself with energy. She can't sit and watch Strictly without leaping up and flinging herself around. The "silly" boys at school dominate her conversation and get her giddy.

On top of all this, she is also talking about when she will "get puberty," and I'm pretty certain her hormones are racing. And then we have the Kevin and Perry tantrums over brushing her teeth or getting dressed or having her haircut, and she hates all of us — especially me — and wants a different family.

And up until now, I had wondered whether maybe she was a bit too hyper and whether just maybe she might be a bit ADHD.

But tonight, I give my head a wobble.

Once again, I think of what I know — in particular Bruce Perry. It's not "what's wrong with you." In my daughter's case it isn't even "what's happened to you."

It's what is happening to you.

She is about to be ten. Of course she has **BIG FEELINGS**.

This is being alive and being ten and feeling all these things before the world takes them away from you. This is being in a class of 30 children for six hours a day, all of whom have big feelings and are trying to make sense of this busy, exciting, messy world.

And it's a shame, really, that even the bodies claiming to move towards inclusion still seem to misunderstand what's actually going on for children. When Sir Martyn Oliver says, "*Too many children are spending too long out of school and falling out of step with the expectations of school life, which makes them more likely to cross boundaries, challenge teachers and disrupt the learning of others,*" you can hear the old story underneath it — that the child '*cannot behave*' and this '*puts other children's education at risk*' and '*heads must have sanctions available to them*'. It's the same logic that always sits behind punitive approaches: if a child is out of step, tighten the discipline until they behave better.

It misses the simple truth: children don't '*fall out of step*' because they're choosing the wrong rhythm. They're overwhelmed, or scared, or dysregulated, or lost — and the tune was never written with their lives, their wiring, or their experiences in mind.

Once again, I realise I've got it wrong. I spend so much time explaining that all emotions are OK. That it's also OK to be not OK. And yet when faced with my own daughter I'm thinking about what's wrong and possibly about labels and reasons.

Now, I'm not pretending this is easy, and I'm not pretending my buttons don't get pushed or that I don't push hers. But what is wrong with me? She is just ten. She has never felt any of these things before and she hasn't yet had it taught out of her. She feels all these emotions and she lets us know each and every one of them.

And isn't that just bloody brilliant?

Exhausting, yes. But brilliant. A reminder, really, that feeling everything isn't the problem — forgetting how to feel is. Although, let's be honest... it would be a funny old world if adults went around sharing their big emotions like ten-year-olds. Maybe learning to tune into our emotions instead of reacting to them might be a good place to start.

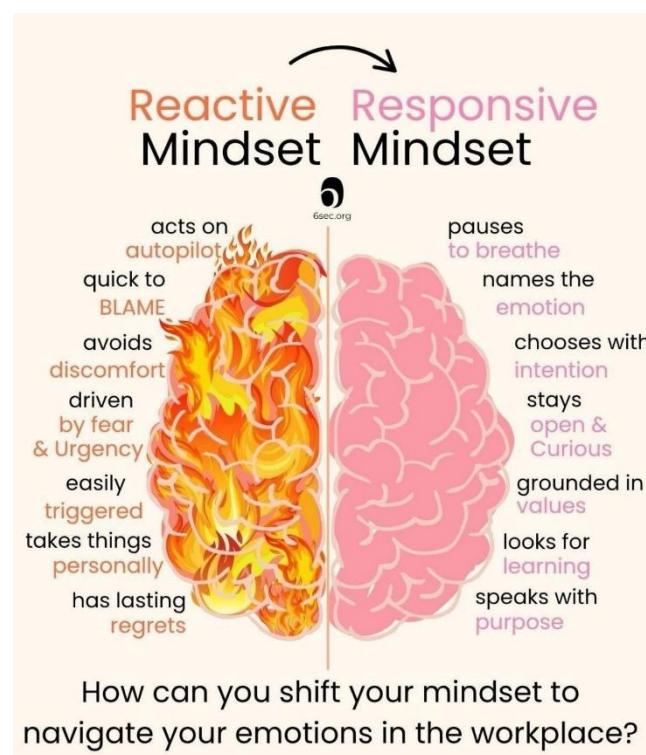
My one-a-day quotes for this week are:

- 1) *If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough.* (unknown)
- 2) *When an adult sends a child away, it usually reflects who truly needs the pause. When we can acknowledge our own need for regulation, we model something powerful: "Everyone gets overwhelmed sometimes — and everyone can take steps to come back to calm.* (Niki Green The Contented Child)



- 3) *Confidence isn't thinking you are better than everyone else, it's realizing that you have no reason to compare yourself to anyone else. (Maryam Hasnaa)*
- 4) *A meaningful silence is always better than meaningless words.*
(@powerofpositivity)
- 5) *We have to start where the child is, not where we believe the child ought to be.*
(Dr. Shefali Tabary)
- 6) *When the road gets bumpy, you don't leave the car, you put the seat belt on.*
(unknown)
- 7) *A child shrinks a little every time they're measured against someone else.*
(artofparenteen)

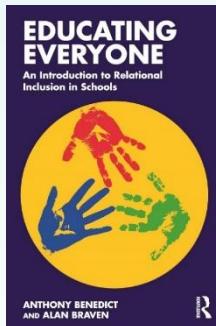
My two print and stick to the wall images this week are:



My recommended read this week is where the disappointing comments from Sir Martin Oliver came from: [Ofsted: Too many pupils 'out of step with school life'](#)

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:

Sunshine all the time makes a desert. (unknown)

Thanks for reading

Anthony Benedict

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