

Relational Inclusion blog #43: Spider Sense

You know when you have one of those great home improvement ideas? Like let's remove the carpet from the living room and lay laminate flooring – it will be a fun weekend activity.

Yeah, we did that.

And after fighting with herringbone flooring for a couple of hours, having already Stanley-knifed the carpet into small pieces, we admitted defeat.

We spent four weeks trying to sort it out whilst our living room looked like something out of Steptoe and Son. Eventually, we found a man who could sand and polish the existing floorboards, and there was light at the end of the tunnel.

For the umpteenth time, the children took their toys back to their bedrooms and I carried the rest of the stuff that had taken residence in our front room for the last ten years down into the basement. I could probably bin half of it, and no one would notice. Eventually, all that was left was the settee, which had to stay because the only way we can get it out is through the window.

And so, the work began. They didn't mess about, but it was going to be a two-day job, and the living room was completely out of action. The piled-up furniture, freshly varnished floor and its toxic smell guaranteed that.

Cue the children coming home from school.

Daughter number one wants her chocolates out of – guess where?

Daughter number two wants her books.

Son number one wants his tablet.

The dog – who won't walk on floorboards for love nor money – strolls happily across the varnish.

As it turns out, that was the fun part. I couldn't have predicted what was to happen next.

Daughter number two refused to change out of her school uniform. In fact, she refused to do anything. She stood with her arms folded as her face grew more tense – a mixture of frustration, anger and confusion.

"I don't want to do anything if I can't go into the living room," she stated.

Over the next hour everything was wrong for her, and she was overwhelmed by her emotions. She screamed at her sister. She stamped upstairs. She shouted and she cried.

As I looked around the rest of the house, I couldn't really blame her. Every room was chaotic with the overspill of the out-of-use living room. There wasn't a safe or familiar space. There was stuff everywhere.

My wife and I sat with our daughter and cuddled her. We talked about how strange it felt, how the house felt wrong and how all the rooms felt different. We talked about how nice it would be when everything was back to normal.

We reinforced that how she was feeling was fine. That everyone feels like that sometimes and that it wasn't surprising. We pointed out the mess. Then we made the best of it and moved things around so that, although it was different, it felt cosy – in a sort of *we're camping in our own house* kind of way.

Interestingly, it didn't affect all the children in the same way. My little boy pretty much carried on regardless. My eldest had a bit of a complain but was okay. My middle daughter – and my cat, who suddenly developed an insatiable appetite and had to have a small portion of every food packet I could find – suffered.

This was, in the grand scheme of things, a small change. It was still our house and our family and our pets, all together, all working through something which felt different.

But it made me think of the children in our schools. Those who struggle when it's a different teacher. Those who find it challenging when there is a school trip or a school play and their routine changes without warning or preparation. Those whose home environment is totally unpredictable and so they are constantly hyper-vigilant. It's a bit like putting your shoes on the wrong feet. In the grand scheme of things, it doesn't matter, but it feels wrong – and you can't think of anything else until it's put right.

And I reflect on how, traditionally, we manage this in schools. Quite honestly, in many cases, it isn't 'managed', or even really considered. Then, when a child can't cope, a behaviour policy is mechanically applied – further backing them into a corner from which they can't escape.

As neurodivergent self-advocate Kieran Rose has written:

SEND is not a framework for inclusion. It is an administrative construct designed to manage difference without requiring the education system itself to change. ([There is no such thing as SEND - The Autistic Advocate](#))

You can't tell a child they're okay.
They need to feel okay.

And that isn't just about their internal thermometer. If the external environment has changed, they may feel this deeply but be unable to understand why things don't feel quite right. And then, as we know, they may behave the feelings they can't articulate.

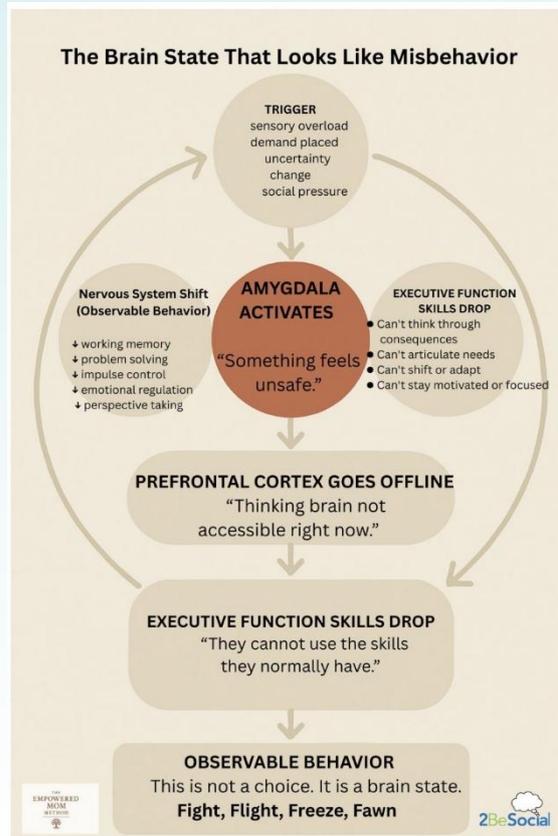
Even as grown-ups, we have that *spider sense* when something feels just a little bit off – and that's often with years of *lived* adult experience.

Would it be so difficult to wonder, imagine and notice with curiosity and empathy before these things happen? We should, after all, know every child in our classrooms. It is our job to help them feel safe and seen. If we are proactive rather than reactive, then maybe many seemingly unpredictable outbursts could be avoided.

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

1. *I've seen a few staff members say: "We treat all of our children the same regardless of any SEND, because we are inclusive." I just want to gently remind people that treating every child the same isn't inclusion. True inclusion means recognising difference and adjusting the environment and support so every child can access learning in a way that works for them.* (Send compass)
2. *One child calms down by jumping on a trampoline. Another finds peace through drawing. One learns best by moving. Another thrives with routines and structure. And all of it is okay.* (The Learning Station)
3. *Spanking teaches fear, not respect. A child who is hurt learns to avoid pain, not to understand right from wrong.* (The Contented Child)
4. *After chaos, peace feels unfamiliar at first. Do not mistake calm for emptiness. It is your nervous system learning safety after surviving survival mode.* (your beautiful life)
5. *Children can only learn to regulate the emotions that they are allowed to have.* (inside parenting)
6. *Needing everything to work out isn't peace. Peace is being ok when it doesn't* (unknown)
7. *My 4-year-old told me he had the 'best day ever.' When I asked why, he said, 'Because I didn't let the bad parts win.' Imagine learning emotional intelligence from someone who still can't tie his shoes.* (thepositiveparenting)

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



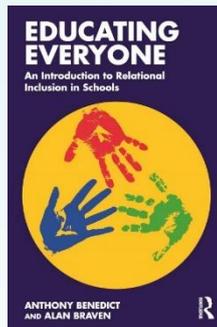
Please, remember that..

- Rest is just as important as progress.
- Peace first, pace later.
- Even small pauses can lead to clarity and peace.
- Slowing down can help you hear your own thoughts.
- Moving too fast can make you miss what truly matters.
- Life isn't a race, it's okay to take your time.

My recommended read this week is [There is no such thing as SEND - The Autistic Advocate](#)

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:

You can't control everything that happens to you, but you can control how you respond.

Thanks for reading

Anthony Benedict

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