

## Relational Inclusion blog #45: Togetherness

Sometimes there just isn't an answer or any kind of realistic solution.

Daughter number 2 seems to have inherited my hay fever, eczema and allergy genes. But, in the way all children must, she appears to have taken it one step further. As the seasons change from summer to autumn, she develops a really aggravating cough. It's particularly prevalent around dusk and, more specifically, at bedtime. I read her a story, she gets ready to settle, and then the cough begins.

I have to be honest — I find the cough really annoying, and I had to have a word with myself. It's one of those tickly type coughs and she can't seem to clear it. I want to say, "Just clear your throat or hold your breath or something" — but I know she can't.

Then I noticed her breathing was raspy and that took us down a potentially more serious asthma route. And then I felt bad for being grumpy with her when she coughed. It's slightly more problematic because it felt unlikely to me that that she had asthma because none of those symptoms are present when she's doing gymnastics or swimming or dancing or running. Exercise usually triggers asthma but not for her. Try explaining that to the doctor. Without boring you with medical appointment details, she was prescribed an inhaler which does help, but I'm not convinced it's the answer. I think her problems are allergy related.

Which leads us to today's problem. She needs to go for a blood test. We need to put some numbing cream on her arm about an hour before, and last time I did that she had a big reaction to the cream. So now we have double refusal.

"You're not putting the cream on me and I'm not going for the blood test," she announces.

My wife and I try to explain why it's important she goes to this appointment.

"Yes," she says, "but you say you can't make me, and it is my choice and I'm not going."

And this is a problem. She does have agency. We absolutely encourage this. But equally she is eight, and this is something we really need to get through.

I explain that the doctor won't prescribe the inhaler again if she won't have the blood test. This means that next time she struggles to breathe at bedtime, we won't have her inhaler and we'll end up in A&E. This has happened before. I'm loosely aware that I might be using scare tactics — but I'm also telling the truth.

I can usually talk her round, but she's not having it.

My next strategy is bribery. Again — maybe not ideal — but I've got to do something and my wife needs to leave in five minutes or she'll miss the appointment.

I offer her a treat. Some kind of dessert first.

“No.”

So I try my trump card: the offer of a new teddy. She has never refused the offer of a soft toy. Her bedroom is already a zoo of fluffy animals, and usually the temptation of another is too much to resist.

Not today.

Still a flat no.

And then the tears start. She’s in that awful position. Maybe she’s scared — and we do try talking about that. Maybe it’s the unknown — we talk about that too. But she’s adamant that she’s not going.

Finally, my wife makes the only offer we have left. We relent on the cream, but explain that she really must attend the appointment. Maybe the nurse will have a different solution.

We smother her with cuddles as tears rain down her face. I can feel her resistance wane a little. She moves from my wife, who’s getting ready for the journey, to me. I pick her up, put her shoes on, and we talk gently as I carry her to the car.

But this is the thing. Sometimes there isn’t an answer or a realistic solution. Sometimes we just have to do things we don’t want to do. Sometimes we can’t calm or soothe in the way we would like, and our children still must do things they really don’t want to do.

Of course, there was a point when I was tempted to shout something like, “*Pull yourself together — you need to do this and it’s happening whether you like it or not.*” But I know that would have been more about my frustration and lack of control than her feelings, and it would only have made things worse.

Teacher Tom talks about how love doesn’t manage children — it doesn’t rely on tricks, power, or control — but on connection, listening, and acceptance. Sitting alongside rather than standing over. It doesn’t make hard things disappear, but it does change how those moments are held.

Maybe this is part of the paradox of being human. We don’t want our children to suffer, but sometimes taking the pain away — or trying to fix the problem — simply pushes it deeper. The short-term gain can remove a longer-term ability to tolerate discomfort or build resilience. Sometimes we just have to sit with our children and hold the space and the pain.

They have to learn that things can be unpleasant — and that together we can get through them. Were we tempted to just cancel the appointment? Of course. Was I tempted to play the *I’m big and you’re small* card? Of course. But neither would have helped in the long run.

My wife did take her to the appointment. The nurse managed to take blood without using the numbing cream. She's eight, so apparently doesn't need numbing cream at all. It might have helped if they'd told us that in the first place. After it was over, we made a big fuss of how brave she'd been.

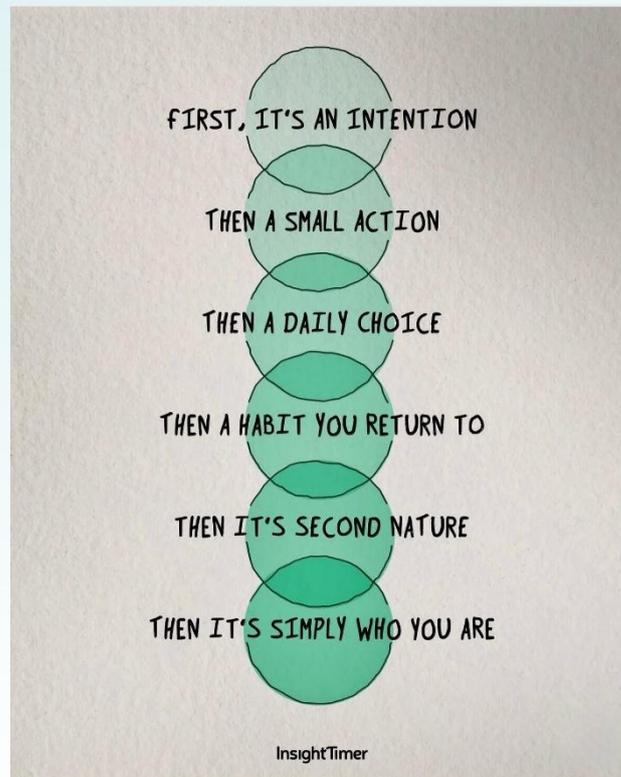
Our children aren't broken. They don't need fixing. We just need to move away from this *silver-bullet mentality* and accept that things don't fit into neat little boxes — and that's okay. Sitting with someone might not take the pain away. But taking away the pain doesn't necessarily make us feel any better.

Feeling the warmth of another person sitting next to you with curiosity and empathy — maybe that is the magic.

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

1. *Children are allowed to make a big deal out of things that feel really big to them. (@empowered.parenting)*
2. *A child's stress whispers a long time before it shouts. (unknown)*
3. *It takes the same amount of time and attention to meet children's emotional needs as it does to deal with behaviours caused by their unmet emotional needs.(Pam)*
4. *Special education isn't about lowering the bar. It's about building a ladder. (Rebekah Poe, Blueprint for Inclusion)*
5. *The child you were is still waiting for the adult you are to listen. (unknown)*
6. *And if those children are unresponsive, maybe you can't teach them yet, but you can love them. And if you love them today, maybe you can teach them tomorrow. (Jeffrey R. Holland)*
7. *Your diet is not only what you eat; it is also what you watch, listen to, read, and the people you spend time with. Pay attention to what you feed your soul, not just your stomach. (@entrepreneurshipfacts)*

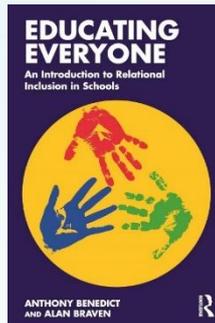
My two print and stick to the wall images this week are:



My recommended read this week is [Teacher Tom: Play-Based Classroom Management is Based on Love, Not Power](#)

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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:

*Today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday and all is well.*

Thanks for reading

Anthony Benedict

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