

Relational Inclusion blog #53: Godzilla

If you read my blogs regularly, you'll know my little boy broke his arm. The break has healed but, as these things tend to, one problem has led to another, and he can't straighten his arm properly.

The physio has given us some exercises to do after bath time when his elbow is warm. We've been doing them every night for ages and usually he's pretty good and just gets on with it.

He is also five, and he's getting bored of them now.

Last night he wanted to change the order we do them in. This usually means we're going to have problems. The pattern doesn't disappoint. I change the order. He does the first exercise but then refuses to do the second. My coaxing skills don't work and we're getting nowhere.

The stars clearly aren't aligned for either of us because it's at this point that I decide to make a really bad call.

My son is really into Godzilla toys, and I've ordered him a *Burning* Godzilla which seems to have got lost in the post. He's been excited about it for weeks.

So, in my wisdom, I say, "If you don't do your exercises I'll have to cancel your Burning Godzilla."

In my defence, I'm thinking he's so desperate for this toy that he'll quickly see sense and do what I want him to do. At the same time, I know somewhere in the back of my mind that this toy wasn't bought with any conditions attached, and it's unfair for me to change things now. I also know he's tired, which is probably the main reason he doesn't want to do his stretches.

Does he say, "Of course I'll do them now daddy. That's all you had to say?"

Of course not. He lays on the floor and cries and snorts while I sit there feeling helpless. I've dug myself into a hole and I'm also cross and not quite ready to back down.

My wife appears and scoops him up. He's in a state. Snot, tears, the lot. There's no chance of any exercises now. I'm left feeling cross, stubborn, and mainly stupid.

He fires a couple of sad, angry glares at me and asks his mum if she can *kick daddy out of the house because he doesn't like him anymore*. I take myself into the kitchen to give us both some space.

When I come back into the living room, I have to wait for the right moment so that I can try to repair.

Eventually it's just me and him. I crawl up beside him, tell him I'm sorry, that I'd been mean, and that I shouldn't have said what I did. He tolerates sitting on my knee.

Then comes the kicker.

I explain that I shouldn't have said he couldn't have his burning Godzilla toy and ask if he'd still like it.

"No," he says. "I don't want it anymore. And we're not friends."

I sit with the *not friends* thing. I'm okay with that. I know he'll come round. But I realise something else too. What I've also done is take away his agency. He has a very strong sense of right and wrong and, at five years old, the only protection he has left is to reject the very thing I know he really wants.

I don't push it.

At bedtime he tells my wife she can have the toy because he doesn't want it anymore.

Usually, it's my wife who settles him, but after his story he calls for me and asks me to cuddle him while he goes to sleep. So, some of the repair has been done.

In the morning the first thing he asks is, "Did you really cancel the Godzilla?"

And this is my real insight. A silly threat, intended to get him to do something for his own good, has massively backfired and left a much longer mark than I ever intended. Fortunately, we've managed the repair. I'm hoping that's that. But there is a lesson here for me.

One of the most common things I'm asked when I work with schools is what to do about children who won't do as they're told. And I get it. It's a school. There are rules. But following a rule and being able to follow a rule aren't always the same thing. Maybe there's another way to approach this by flipping things around.

First, we need to get to the root of the problem. Is the thing they don't want to do really the issue, or is something else lurking in the background? That's always the first port of call.

And if there's nothing obvious underneath, then maybe we look at the thing itself differently. Could it be made more appealing, more meaningful, more worthwhile?

There were lots of things I could have done to coax my son into doing his exercises. And if I'm honest, I'd read the signs. He was tired. With a clear explanation, we probably could have skipped them for one night.

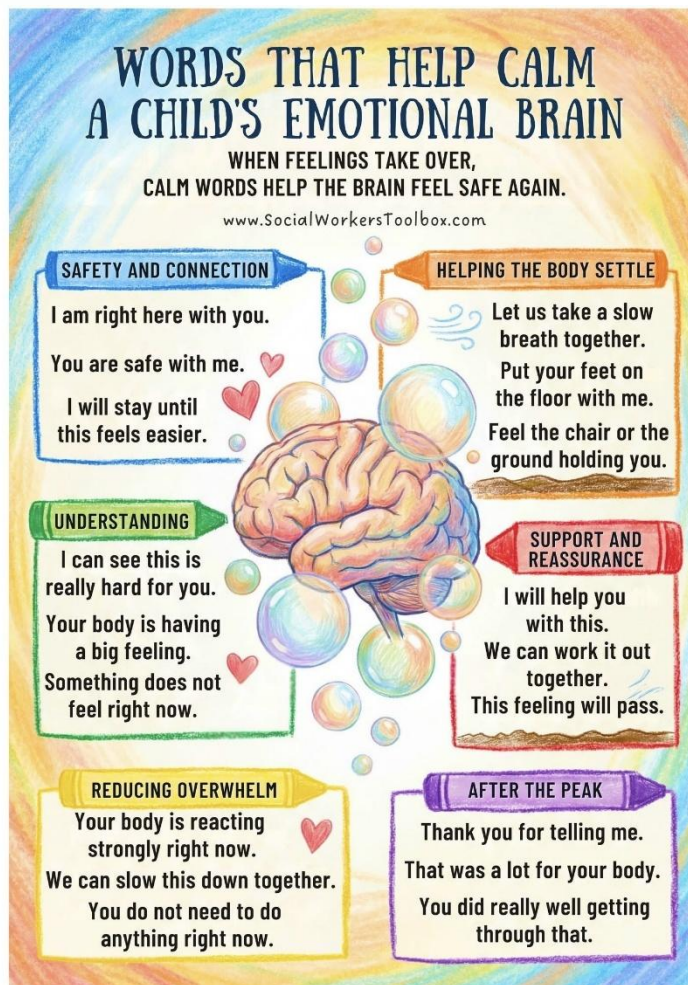
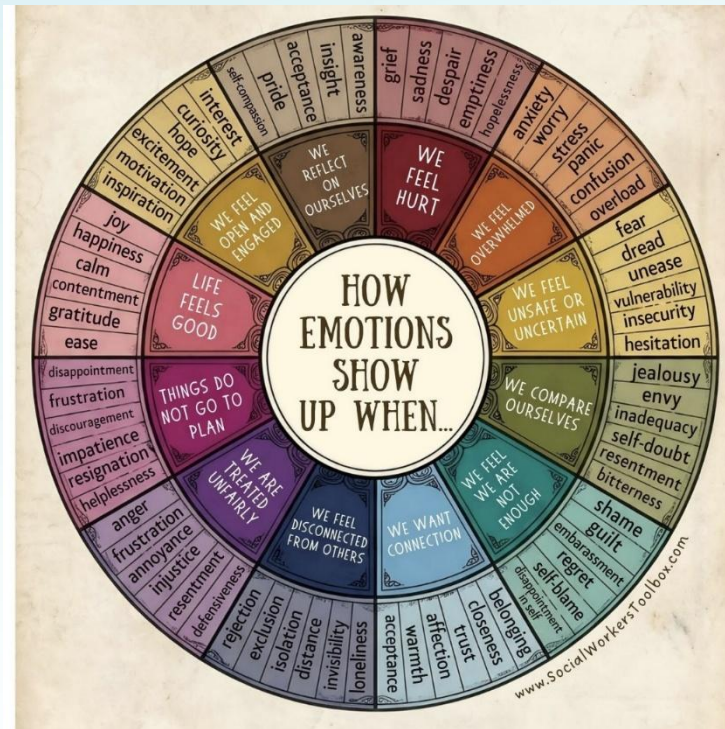
We have to be the adult. We have to try our best not to escalate situations beyond proportion.

And when we do, because we all do, the real work is about genuine repair.

My one a day quotes for this week are:

1. *All behavior is an attempt at regulation, even behaviors that society might label "inappropriate."* (Lisa Dion)
2. *Children bloom where repair matters more than perfection.* (unknown)
3. *Calling school "preparation for real life" only makes sense if we believe real life is about obedience, compliance, competition, and external validation. It's worth asking whether that's the life we actually want to prepare children for.* (unknown)
4. *If your child is melting down, they're not giving you a hard time, they're having a hard time. And it's okay if it triggers you... but your triggers aren't their responsibility. Pause, breathe, then parent. The goal is regulation, not domination.* (Mr. Wright Way)
5. *Inclusion isn't a strategy. It's a belief in every student's potential.* (unknown)
6. *The amount of good things in your life depends on your ability to notice them.* (unknown)
7. *We remain empty when we obsess over the one giant thing that cannot fit, while ignoring the million small things that could fill us.* (unknown)

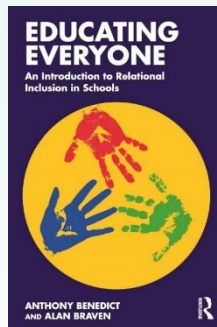
My two print and stick to the wall images this week are:



My recommended read this week is an interesting comment challenging the idea that the body keeps the score: [Frontiers | The body does not keep the score: trauma, predictive coding, and the restoration of metastability](#)

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:

If our calm depends on our children's compliance, we aren't leading, we're being led. (Inside Parenting)

Thanks for reading
Anthony Benedict

CEO Ambition Community Trust