



Relational Inclusion blog #64: Hungry Hippos

It's ten past eight. The kids are ready early for a change and I'm about to take a shower and breathe a little. They're playing Hungry Hippos 2. Why on earth did they need to invent a second version? It's like Grease 2 all over again. Folk are greedy I suppose.

For those who don't know. Version two has a little motor and the hippos' mouths flip open and closed and you have to sort of catapult the little marble things into their mouths. In theory it should work. In practice it's a bit crap.

From what I can hear through the closed bathroom door my 5-year-old is struggling to make it work properly and daughter number one is telling him off for cheating.

And now it's escalating. Being ready early isn't always such a good idea. Who was I kidding thinking I could steal more than a couple of minutes to feel the ground? I push the bathroom door open. My son, the youngest, is standing firm with his back towards the game a few steps away. Daughters number one and two hover somewhere between taking their turn and giving up.

'And that is exactly why your friends behave the way they do and move away from games they are playing with you.'

Which isn't exactly subtle, doesn't land quite how it did inside my head and gains me an icy stare and a sentence explaining that I don't know what I'm talking about delivered more politely than I probably deserve.

I take myself upstairs and away before I say something even more stupid.

After a few minutes I call daughter number one and to my surprise she comes without giving me another mouthful.

I purposely don't apologise. What I said wasn't wrong. It was my delivery that was the problem. After all this is exactly how she behaves with her friends (I know this from what she tells me and, I am her dad, I pretty much know how she works). And I have more than an inkling that this is why sometimes she ends up on her own. That doesn't mean she deserves to feel how that makes her feel, she's only ten. But explaining it to her so she understands and can maybe make different choices is the key and also the problem.

"I wasn't being mean and I am sorry if you thought I was." I begin. "But I do think it's really important that when I notice things that you don't get quite right, I tell you, so that you can see it and then maybe you might want to try it differently."

And then I tell her that people like patterns because we're funny animals like that. I can tell I have her attention or at least her curiosity.

And I explain that now that she's ten, sometimes it's fun to watch people and try and follow their pattern or work out what it is.

We talk through a few fairly obvious patterns - people who want attention; people who avoid trouble.

And then we talk through how if one person is very argumentative and feels so strongly that they can't let it go, that this can spoil a game (even if they ARE right). Because other people just want to get on with the game and don't care about who was right or wrong anyway.

She gives me her beaming smile because she knows I'm talking about her.

And then I say, "Sometimes, if you do find yourself on your own, well, sit yourself down, and watch your friends. And spend a bit of time seeing if you can spot their patterns."

I also tell her it's very important that she doesn't tell them what their pattern is - especially in the middle of an argument - and I think she gets it.

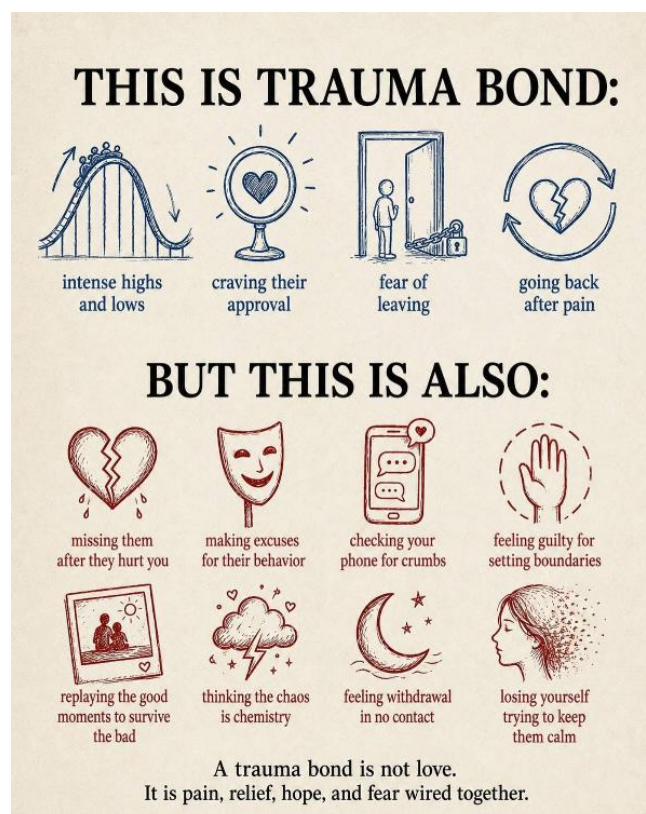
And then the doorbell rings and we're catapulted back into our morning pattern.

I've no idea if I said the right thing. I can imagine my wife's eyes rolling at my *pattern spotting* explanation. My daughter still thinks there is a science behind why dogs look like their owners (which I'm pretty sure is fact). But most of the time I think you have to talk to children like the people they are and let them make their own sense of it. What's the worst that can happen? Someone invents Hungry Hippos 3.

My one a day quotes for this week are:

1. *Compliment people. Magnify their strengths, not their weaknesses.* (unknown)
2. *Ships that wait for the perfect winds never sail.* (unknown)
3. *The less people think the louder they are.* (unknown)
4. *The most underrated act of kindness is simply letting people be. Let them mispronounce a word, talk too much about a show they love, or get excited about something you don't quite understand. Everyone has something that lights them up, let them shine, even if it's not your thing.* (UnknownLifeLessons)
5. *When we understand that each day isn't one more day, but one less, we'll start giving more value to the things that truly matter.* (ThrivingStudio)
6. *Instead of asking yourself why the same things always happen to you, ask yourself why you keep choosing the same paths.* (unknown)
7. *Know what happens when people don't feel heard? They get louder. Remember, behavior is communication. Children don't just act up. They speak up. Listen for the need behind the behavior.* (L. R. Knost)

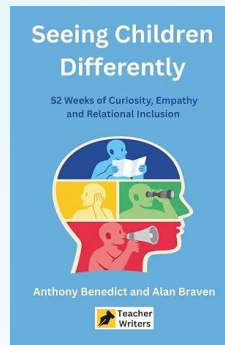
My two print and stick to the wall images this week are:



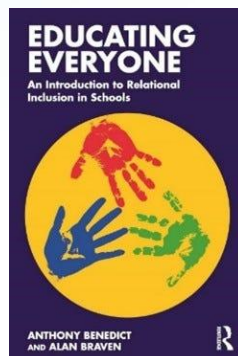
My recommended read this week is about [2 Million Children Are Unhappy In UK Schools – This Is Why | HuffPost UK Parents](#)

If you find the Relational Inclusion blog useful, feel free to share with your networks.

Our brand-new book, [Seeing Children Differently](#) is out now and available from Amazon.



Our first book, *Educating Everyone: An Introduction to relational Inclusion in Schools* is also still available and you must buy it and tell everyone else to buy it too. It is available pretty much everywhere that sells books or you can get it here: [Educating Everyone](#)



Finally, I'd like to share a quote which has really stuck in my mind:

Be helpful. When you see a person without a smile, give them yours. (unknown)

Thanks for reading
Anthony Benedict

CEO Ambition Community Trust