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Reimagining Relationships: From Control to Connection

The question isn't "*How do I get them to do what I want?*"
It's "*What do they need, and how can I support that?*"

A reimagining of Alfie Kohn's work.

Whether you're guiding a child through a meltdown, listening to a distressed partner, or responding to a colleague who's overwhelmed, the same principle applies: understanding must come before instruction.

This shift transforms our role from authoritarian enforcers to guides. When we respond with control - yelling, criticism, shame - we may gain short-term compliance but lose long-term trust. This isn't growth. It's fear.

"When (little) people are overwhelmed by big emotions, it's our job to share our calm, not join their chaos." - L.R. Knost

Instead of rushing to correct or critique:

Pause and ground yourself.

Acknowledge the emotion behind the behaviour.

Stay curious, not controlling.

Choose presence over pressure.

Connection is regulation. It's not just about people complying - it's about people feeling safe enough to grow.

"Correcting someone while they're dysregulated doesn't teach - it threatens. And threat shuts down learning." - Adapted from trauma-informed practice.

This is especially true for neurodivergent individuals, whose needs often go misunderstood or dismissed. We all benefit when agency, not obedience, is the goal.

“Correction without connection leads to trauma.”



Agency Is a Right, Not a Reward

True belonging means recognising and respecting neurodivergent agency:
Supporting Human Agency Looks Like:

Listening without judgment or assumption

Valuing all forms of communication

Recognising that success isn't one-size-fits-all

Trusting lived experience over stereotypes

Respecting “no” as a valid and complete answer, without punishment

Offering support without strings attached

Trusting one's own instincts, free from internalised shame.

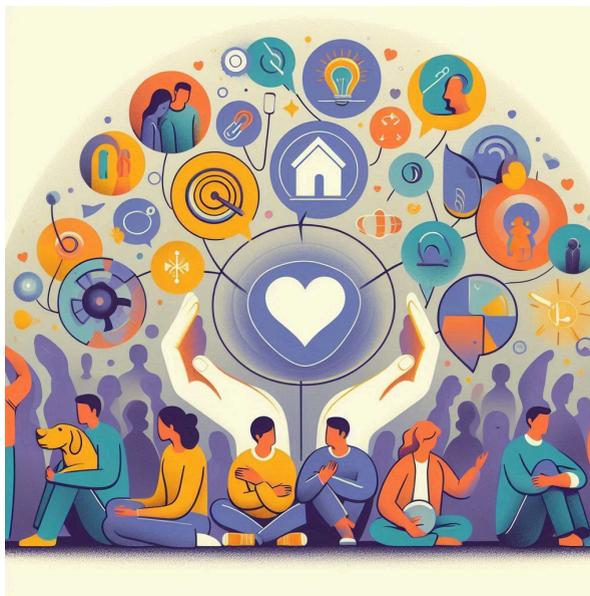
Defining success on personal terms.

Being believed when expressing needs.

“Agency means being seen and believed - even when we communicate differently.”

“No” is a complete sentence.

“Choose your child's mental health over everything. They're not achievements; they're humans.”



🌻 **Let's Choose Influence Over Authority**

We all influence our children - whether through fear or through relationship. Humans instinctively resist control, but gravitate toward connection. Choose wisely.

“Connection over correction. Curiosity over compliance. Presence over perfection.”

Phrases That Foster Safety and Connection:

“I’m here.”

“You’re safe with me, even when it feels hard for you.”

“Would a hug help in this moment?”

“You can tell me anything.”

“I can help, if you’d like.”

“Would it help if we took a break together?”

“If you know what you need, tell me and I listen.”

In a world obsessed with fixing, controlling, and correcting - be the person who connects.

Because whether someone is five or fifty, what they most need in their hardest moments is this:

“I’m not going anywhere.”

Connection over correction. Attunement over authority.

Understanding over urgency. Rhythm over rigidity



A Compassionate Approach to Exploring Our Sensory Experiences

Our body is always sending us signals - like little clues that help us understand what we need to feel safe, connected, and comfortable in the world. Our body speaks to us in powerful ways. When we get curious about these body clues, we can make choices that honour what feels best for us in the moment. And remember: our needs can change day to day, and that's okay!

There is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to sensing our world. What feels good and regulating to one person might feel overwhelming to another. The most important thing is to listen to our body with kindness and curiosity, without judgment. When we honour our sensory needs, we create more moments of ease and connection - with ourselves and with the world around us.

Keep exploring, keep noticing, and remember - you are the expert of your own body.

**EXPLORING OUR SENSORY EXPERIENCES –
A COMPASSIONATE APPROACH**

Our sensory experiences are beautifully diverse and always valid. Some of us are drawn toward sensory input, while others prefer to avoid it. And many of us experience shifts in our needs depending on our environment, energy levels, and sense of safety.

The first step toward meaningful support is embracing curiosity: pausing to listen deeply, honouring what our body is communicating, and respecting our needs without expectation or judgment.

Let's explore the different ways sensory experiences might show up and how we can support them with understanding:

<p>TOUCH (TACTILE SENSATIONS):</p> <p>Some of us crave comforting pressure, certain textures, or soft fabrics. Others may find light touch, scratchy materials, or tags deeply uncomfortable.</p> <p><i>Support tip: Empower choice. Honour boundaries around touch and texture preferences.</i></p> 	<p>VESTIBULAR (BALANCE AND MOVEMENT):</p> <p>Movement can feel regulating, like spinning, jumping, or rocking. Others might find too much movement unsettling and prefer steadiness.</p> <p><i>Support tip: Provide safe spaces for movement or calm. Respect each person's rhythm.</i></p> 
<p>SIGHT (VISUAL INPUT):</p> <p>Some of us delight in bright colours and patterns, while others may feel drained or overstimulated by visual clutter.</p> <p><i>Support tip: Honour visual comfort. Create calming spaces with adjustable lighting or visual breaks.</i></p> 	<p>PROPRIOCEPTION (BODY AWARENESS):</p> <p>Helps us feel where our body parts are without needing to look. It's our inner body map! Acknowledging this can feel grounding and organizing. For others, too much input might feel tingling or uncomfortable.</p> <p><i>Support tip: Offering choices for proprioceptive input can bring a wonderful sense of connection and calm. Let's tune in with curiosity.</i></p> 
<p>SOUND (AUDITORY INPUT):</p> <p>Sounds can feel joyful and energizing – or, at times, overwhelming and painful.</p> <p><i>Support tip: Use softer tones, reduce background noise, and offer noise-cancelling tools like headphones when needed.</i></p> 	<p>INTERNAL SIGNALS (INTEROCEPTION):</p> <p>Our internal body cues (like hunger, thirst, or needing the bathroom) may feel muted or overwhelmingly intense.</p> <p><i>Support tip: Offer gentle check-ins and create supportive routines without pressure or urgency.</i></p> 
<p>SMELL (OLFACTORY INPUT):</p> <p>Scents might be grounding and pleasant, or they may feel intrusive and overpowering.</p> <p><i>Support tip: Stay mindful of fragrances in shared spaces. Support scent-free environments when helpful.</i></p> 	<p>TASTE AND ORAL INPUT:</p> <p>There can be comfort in crunchy, chewy, or bold flavours, while others may feel safer with bland, familiar foods.</p> <p><i>Support tip: Respect food preferences and avoid pressuring sensory exploration at mealtimes.</i></p> 

Our bodies are always communicating with us, and our sensory needs offer valuable insight into what helps us feel safe, regulated, and engaged. There is no "wrong" way to sense and experience the world. With understanding and curiosity, we can create environments that nurture regulation and connection.

Community as Connection - A Moment That Moved Us

In a world overflowing with information and expectation, what truly cuts through is *connection* - the kind that feels seen, held, and human. Recently, we received a message that beautifully captured this:

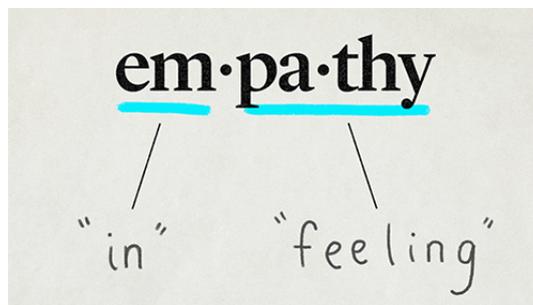
“You’ve captured the exact feelings we so often talk about... as carers and parents walking alongside our children, and in the ways we connect with each other in community. You reflect a deep understanding and sense of belonging that’s rarely found, and so needed.”

It reminded us why we do this. Every resource we share, every story, every quiet nudge to pause and reconnect - it’s all rooted in a belief that we’re stronger together. That change, especially the kind that affirms neurodivergent lives, doesn’t happen through control or correction, but through collective care. Whether you're supporting a child, advocating in your workplace, or navigating your own journey, you're part of a living, breathing network of people who are choosing compassion, understanding, and connection.

To everyone who’s read, shared, or simply paused with our words - *thank you.*

You’re proof that compassion ripples.

Let’s keep showing up - for each other, with each other.



In solidarity,
The Collaborators @ GRANN



“It’s fascinating how nature shows us what strength truly looks like - how something can fall apart and still find a way to transform, adapt, and thrive. It’s never about one bee, really, but about how the hive responds when things shift. Sometimes, unexpected growth happens in those quiet moments after the chaos, and new rhythms emerge.

I’ve learned a lot watching that unfold in real time.”

-Bee Austin, GRANN President (Psychosocial Rehabilitation Coach)



**Centre for Autistic
Social Entrepreneurship**

Exciting News!

GRANN Joins the Centre for Autistic Social Entrepreneurship!

We're proud to announce our new membership with the *Centre for Autistic Social Entrepreneurship* - a dynamic network championing Autistic-led innovation and inclusive economic futures. This partnership reflects GRANN's ongoing commitment to disability justice, creative leadership, and community-driven change.

Stay tuned for collaborative projects, workshops, and fresh opportunities to elevate autistic voices in social enterprise!



GRANN is Also Now a Member of People and Planet First!

We're thrilled to share that GRANN has joined *People and Planet First*, a global initiative recognising organisations committed to social and environmental impact over profit. This membership aligns with our values of justice, sustainability, and grassroots leadership.

Together, we're building a future where communities - not corporations - lead the way.

Share Your Community News with GRANN! ***We'd love your input!***

Do you have something to share with the GRANN community? We're always looking for contributions for our newsletter! Whether it's an upcoming event, a personal story, resources, or important updates, we'd love to include it.

Email GRANN your suggestions or anything you would like to share
or hit us up on Messenger - we can't wait to hear from you!
Let's keep our community informed and connected!

Gladstone Region Autistic & Neurodivergent Network Inc.

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