

STRETCHING

When we think about stretching the majority of us would almost immediately begin to think about physical or intellectual stretching.

For some, the idea of 'stretching' people seems contrary or unusual. But when we think about it in the context of striving to better others, and ourselves logically it begins to make sense.

The Gentle Teaching theme of the month is going to look at process of stretching the people we serve: how we do it, why do it and when it should be done.



A dimension that is often hard to understand and deal with involves the emergence of self-centeredness, becoming spoiled, after a time of intense nurturing. It is natural to become self-centered as a result of constant nurturing. This creates another important care giving role. We need to slowly begin to focus on stretching the person away from self-centeredness and toward other-centeredness. This stretching process involves reminding the person that he/she is safe and loved while asking a slight degree more—waiting a moment, taking turns, sharing, and other virtues involving others and our relationships. This process is very delicate so we need to keep reminding the person of how safe and loved he/she is.

The developmental model outlined below is a good guide for us to use to understand the various dimensions of new memories that have to be taught:

- **From broken hearted and lonely, to safe and loved;**
- **From self-centeredness, to reaching out to others and loving expressing love to them; and,**
- **From dependence on us, to engagement with others and us.**

Our pedagogical process starts with us encountering a brokenhearted person and brining two simple gifts that we have repeatedly mentioned—the feeling of being safe and loved. We have nothing else to give. These are not a program, a clinical approach, or focused on outcomes. They can, if necessary, be translated into mundane outcomes, but, for the caregiver, they are gifts and these now established feelings need to begin to include being safe with a growing circle of others and becoming a meaningful part of increasing engagement. This stretching process is a part of normal development. These include learning other moral milestones such as learning to share, a giving up, momentarily, of what is theirs; learning to wait and to take turns; wanting others to feel proud; and, learning when enough is enough—self-control. We all have to learn these milestones. Each requires a grounded stance that assumes that the brokenhearted person has learned to feel safe and loved and is ready for participation in a broader community. After these have been formed in the person's moral memory, we can then begin focusing on strengthening self-esteem, learning that "I am good!" and self-control, learning when enough is enough!" The person's world and responsibilities begin to expand."

-John McGee

- 1 As a team, come up with a definition of stretching? (Don't move on to the next question until everyone understands the concept of stretching.)
- 2 Does your team (as a whole) stretch the people that you serve? If so, how? If not, why?
- 3 With the people you serve, when are their best moments to be stretched? What are some signals of it not being a good time to stretch?
- 4 Take a few moments and share how each person stretches those that you serve. If you do not currently stretch the people you serve don't go fishing for an answer, just be honest. This is a good way to gage where the team is.
- 5 Together as a team, spend a few moments creatively brainstorming how you could go about implementing stretching techniques for three of the following. (Day programs, travel, meals out, household chores, sleep schedules, grocery shopping, spending money, community involvement, etc.)
- 6 I'm a firm believer in the bystander effect: that people assume that someone else will address the (emergency, crisis, problem, 9-1-1 call) issue at hand. Over the course of the next month, in what way(s) will you commit to practice stretching the person you serve.