



Stretching

Like A Rubber Band

To stretch someone is an intentional act of calculated discomfort. Stretching is done with the purpose of deepening one's comfort level and understanding of trust in any given relationship. Stretching is the continual process of building long-term abilities (through relationship) by slowly equipping those we support with new and different opportunities.

Stretching takes time and creativity. The process for stretching must be highly intentional, breaking tasks and activities down into bite size portions. As with our Gentle Teaching journey, there is an expectation that not only will the person receiving service work on stretching, but there is also the expectation that we are willing to stretch as caregivers and lead the way in role modeling our willingness to adapt and grow in new environments and with new tasks. Having a sense of direction and purpose, along with resilience in our stretching as caregivers is essential.

If a new caregiver jumped right in to stretching a person supported, it could hinder the foundation of the relationship: inserting an element of "power", challenging a person to places that they are not ready to go with the support. If someone I feel safe with and trust asks me to do something and I feel safe and loved, I am more likely to do what the person asks. When trusting relationships exist, people can see the value in doing things together. When demands are placed on another before trust has been established, you may experience resistance.

Learning to Stretch the Band

We need to be keen observers of other people's responses.

Reiterate Messages of Safety and Love, enhancing these messages through a stretching phase.

Sometimes (if you imagine loosely dangling a rubber band between your fingers). Sometimes we aren't stretching the person enough or at all. Like the rubber band, this feels loose, easy and there is no pressure or expectation. This can be an enjoyable place for a person to be in – at times. However, a rubber band was made to stretch and reach its full ability by holding things together, this is when the rubber band is at its best and doing what it was meant to be. People are the same. Sure, it's nice, at times to have no pressure or expectations.

Sometimes you can stretch a rubber band too fast or too far and it snaps; we don't want to stretch a person so quickly or far that they 'snap' - this could result in a tough moment or a decrease in trust, relationship and/or willingness to try again. But we are most happy when we are living to our max ability, being all we were created to be. We desire this fulfillment for the people we support!

Imagine stretching someone into learning a new skill, coping tool or routine; or stretching them to learn to wait a little longer for an activity, delay the gratification or frequency of things like a cigarette, coffee, coke etc., think of the tolerance or the ability of the person to stretch like a rubber band

What Did John Say?

“The strong caregiver example and his/her encounter form a moral map, a moral outline, a representation of safe, loved, loving, and human engagement. These are not intellectual memories, but more like an outline of life filled with companionship and supported by a caring community.”

They are deeper moral memories that point to the right direction in human interactions, give self-esteem, and make us open to friendships and community. The first seedlings involve learning to feel safe and loved and in time, these feelings evolve into loving others and growing each person's ability to become engaged in his/her life-project.

The dimension that is perhaps hardest to understand involves the emergence of self-centeredness after a time of intense nurturing. We want the person to be other-centered, and this requires a stretching process, always 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.

Q1

How is the person you are supporting currently being stretched? Are there certain people who are the most successful?

In which ways could stretching be valuable for the person (new skills, tolerance, engagement, etc.)?

Q2

Q3

What are specific ways we will commit to introducing stretching in the lives of others and in our own lives?

Connecting to Our Purpose

Nurturing, teaching, and sustaining connectedness, companionship, and community directly support the practice of stretching. Stretching builds trust and relationship: When you encourage someone to try something new, you're often saying, "I believe in you." That belief, especially when it's expressed with care and presence, builds a relational bridge. It says: You're not alone in this. And when people feel supported as they stretch, they come to trust the connection, which deepens companionship and a sense of belonging.

Stretching opens space for shared vulnerability: Trying new things, especially things outside one's comfort zone, often comes with uncertainty, self-doubt, even fear. But when people share those vulnerable moments, authentic connection grows. It's in those "I'm not sure I can do this" conversations and the "You've got this, and I'm here with you" responses, that real community forms.

Stretching strengthens the web of community: When individuals grow, they bring back something to the community, new insights, new skills, new courage. This becomes shared practice and experience. Communities that stretch together by learning, creating, and taking risks, tend to be more resilient, imaginative, and bonded. Growth becomes a collective experience, not just an individual one.