

# Autonomy & Togetherness

In Gentle Teaching, one of our core values is that of Interdependence. In this month's theme we will explore the differences between interdependence and independence as we seek to form a deeper understanding of what interdependence looks like.

## Independence

Being independent means:

- **Self-sufficient:** You rely primarily on yourself for emotional, financial, and decision-making needs.
- **Autonomous:** You make choices without needing approval or support from others.
- **Boundaries:** You maintain clear personal boundaries and don't depend on others to define your identity or worth.

Think of independence as standing tall on your own two feet—strong, capable, and self-directed.

## Interdependence

Being interdependent means:

- **Mutual support:** You and others rely on each other in a healthy, balanced way.
- **Shared responsibility:** You collaborate, communicate, and contribute to each other's well-being.
- **Preserved individuality:** You maintain your own identity while being connected and cooperative.

Interdependence is like a dance—each person moves freely, but in sync with the other. It's not about losing yourself in someone else but growing together while staying whole.

## Key Difference

| Trait           | Independent                  | Interdependent                       |
|-----------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Reliance        | On self                      | On self and others                   |
| Identity        | Self-defined                 | Self-defined, but enriched by others |
| Relationships   | Minimal emotional dependence | Emotional connection with boundaries |
| Decision-making | Solo                         | Collaborative when needed            |

Independence is about standing alone, while interdependence is about standing together—without collapsing into each other.

## Interdependence in Gentle Teaching

Gentle Teaching sees every person as inherently relational. It's built on the idea that **human beings thrive through connection**, not isolation. Here's how interdependence is woven into GT:

- **Rooted in Relationship:** The Latin root of "interdependence" is *inter*, meaning "among" or "between." Gentle Teaching uses this to emphasize that our identities and well-being are shaped *between* people—not in solitude.
- **Psychology of Interdependence:** This framework encourages caregivers, mentors, and supports to see themselves as part of a shared emotional experience. Their role is to model warmth, unconditional love, and companionship, especially for those who feel marginalized or disconnected.

- The Four Pillars: Gentle Teaching teaches people:
  - a. How to feel safe
  - b. How to feel loved
  - c. How to be loving
  - d. How to be engaged

These pillars are all about **mutuality**—not just giving care, but receiving it, and building a sense of belonging through shared emotional experiences.

- **Companionship Over Compliance:** Instead of focusing on behavior correction, Gentle Teaching fosters genuine relationships. It's about being with someone, not doing something to or for them. Interdependence here means valuing each other unconditionally, regardless of ability or behavior.
- **Creating Meaningful Moments:** Gentle Teaching encourages mentors and caregivers to use their presence, hands, eyes, and words to build trust and connection. These tools help cultivate a sense of community and shared humanity, which is the essence of interdependence.

### Why It Matters

Gentle Teaching reframes interdependence as a **source of strength**, not weakness. It teaches that:

- We are not whole without others.
- Our emotional safety and growth depend on being seen, valued, and loved.
- True healing and learning happen in **relationships**, not isolation.

## What Did John Say?

**John McGee said that, “When it comes to broken heartedness, I have witnessed that there are very few significant differences from one culture to another. However, cultures that are built on a spirit of connectedness and interdependence have often been more prepared to express a sense of companionship and community than cultures that focus on independence and standing on one’s own two feet”.**

**Q1**

**How does this change your thoughts on the concepts of independence / interdependence?**

**In what ways are you currently taking an independent mind set toward supporting the people you serve?**

**Q2**

**Q3**

**How can we switch our thinking and approach to our support by being more intentionally focused on becoming interdependent?**