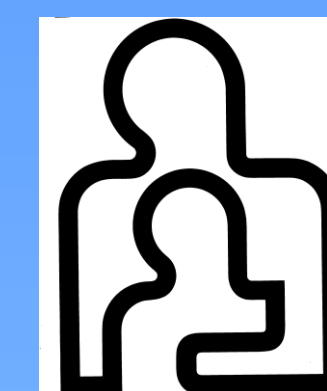# Therapeutic interventions to promote independence for children/adolescents with developmental disabilities

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Introduction

A majority of children/adolescents with developmental disabilities crave some form of independence and seek to gain more skills, however, they also display a poor understanding of their environment which makes this goal challenging. As many children/adolescents with developmental disabilities are unable to participate in typical talk or art therapy, interventions for these children/adolescents requires the use of practical and concrete tools. The following two approaches start with basic awareness and understanding of social environments and also break social goals into smaller steps to help foster independence.

Stranger Danger

The goal of teaching children/adolescents with developmental disabilities about stranger danger is to examine the difference between friend, family, acquaintance, stranger and online friend. Breaking these relationships down into concrete and relatable terms increase the child/adolescent's ability to comprehend different social relationships.
Children/adolescents must first have an understanding of personal information. This includes name, address, school name, individuals who live in their home, family routines, important dates, parents' jobs, names of family members, etc.
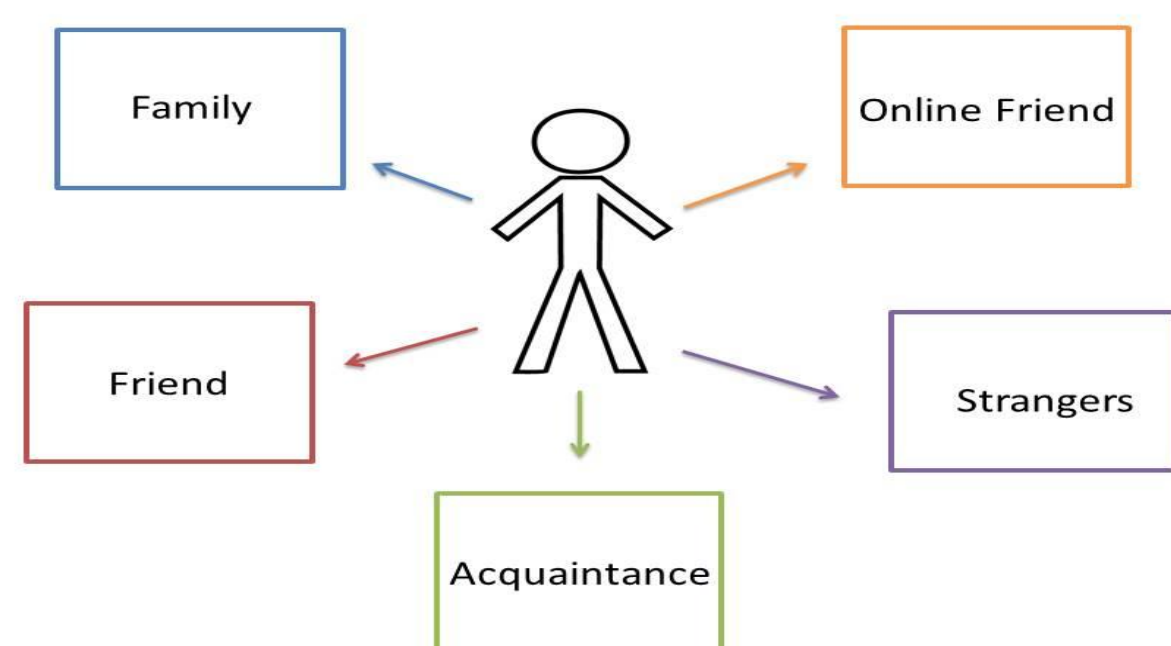
Who is….?

Family: You are related to them and have a lot of shared experiences.
Friend: Knows **more than three** pieces personal information
Acquaintance: You almost always see them in the same place; You know **less than three** pieces of personal information about each other.
Stranger: You may recognize their face, but you don't know anything about them; They may recognize you but don't know any personal information about you.
Online Friend: You "meet" online when playing a video game, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.; You recognize their voices and screen-name but would not recognize them on the street;
Most of your conversations are about the game or picture, etc.
The next step is to discuss appropriate versus inappropriate behavior and how much personal information one might share with different categories of individuals.

Multi-Step Approach

In this next framework, a goal is deconstructed into smaller tangible steps. By understanding and meeting each step, children/adolescents are elevated to independence through measurable achievements.

What are the Steps?

The first step is to identify a specific goal. For example: crossing the street.
The second step is to determine all steps in completing the goal of crossing the street This can be most challenging; be aware of assumed knowledge and be as concrete as possible. For example, what does it mean to look both ways when crossing the street? What am I looking for? What do I do if I see a car? Etc.
The third step is to work on each step, one at a time. A child/adolescent should master one step before moving to the next.
This approach increases a child/adolescent's confidence each time they conquer one step, even if they do not reach the last step.

Conclusion

Independence looks different in each child/adolescent. Arming them with understanding social relationships and increasing awareness of their social environment is the beginning stage of promoting independence. Another framework to increase independence is using a multi-step approach, which deconstructs goals into concrete steps. These two approaches result in positive changes in children/adolescents with developmental disabilities including increased independence and decreased anxiety, depression, anger and other behavior issues.

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