

More Than One Way to Grow

A reflection for looking beyond expected milestones when supporting independence in children with a disability.



A milestone can be one pathway.

It does not have to be the only one.

Independence can develop in many different ways. Sleepovers, camps, respite, community activities, friendships and time away from family can all create opportunities for growth.

But completing a particular milestone is not the same thing as developing independence.

Before deciding that a child needs to do something more independently, it can help to ask what we are actually hoping they will gain from the experience.

THE INDEPENDENCE GOAL CHECK

INSTEAD OF ONLY ASKING...

ASK...



Can they stay overnight?



Are they developing confidence away from their usual routine?



Can they attend without a parent?



Are they gaining more choice and participation?



Can they do this without help?



Can they have greater control over the help they receive?



Are they ready for respite?



What experiences are we hoping respite would provide — and are there other ways to provide them?



LOOK AT THE GOAL BENEATH THE MILESTONE

Are we building independence — or measuring whether the child can complete an expected milestone?

The milestone is not always the goal.



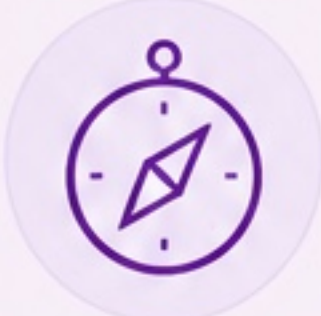
Same Goal, Different Path

Different experiences can develop the same confidence, choice and connection.



There can be more than one route towards the same goal.

Different paths. A brighter future.

	GOAL Friendship and social participation Building and maintaining meaningful connections with peers.	POSSIBLE PATHWAYS  Staying overnight at a friend's house.  Attending the evening and going home before bedtime.  Meeting friends again the following morning.  Having friends visit the child's home.  Joining community activities with peers.
	GOAL Confidence away from usual routines Developing confidence in new environments and experiences.	POSSIBLE PATHWAYS  Respite.  A day activity.  Camp with familiar support.  Gradually increasing time away from parents.  Attending an activity with another trusted adult.
	GOAL Greater autonomy Building choice, decision-making and control over everyday experiences.	POSSIBLE PATHWAYS  Choosing activities.  Deciding who provides support.  Speaking up about preferences.  Making age-appropriate decisions.  Taking responsibility for parts of a routine while still receiving physical assistance.



Different pathways can develop the same skill.

Different participation can still build the same confidence, choice and connection.

Before Calling It Dependence

Look at the child, the family and the context before deciding what independence should look like.



Family closeness and independence are not opposites.

Different families. Different paths. Equally valid.



01 Look at the context

- Is this actually a disability issue, or simply a family preference?
- Could culture influence how this family approaches separation, sleepovers or extended-family life?
- Is the child being compared with peers who have a disability?
- Is family closeness being interpreted as dependence without looking at the child's actual autonomy?

Different families can value independence differently.



02 Look at the opportunities

- Does the child have opportunities and relationships outside their parents?
- Is the child being encouraged to stretch themselves in ways that are meaningful to them?
- Is support allowing participation rather than preventing independence?
- Could the activity be adapted instead of abandoned or forced?

Participation can change without the goal disappearing.



03 Look at the child

- What does the child think about the experience?
- Are we respecting the difference between “not ready yet” and “never capable”?
- Is the child being given choice and a say in what independence looks like to them?
- Are we recognising their effort, progress and different way of participating?

The child's voice matters in deciding their path.



ONE GOAL, MORE THAN ONE PATHWAY

The independence goal is:

The expected pathway has been:

Another way this child could work towards the same goal is:

A child does not have to follow every conventional milestone to keep growing in confidence, autonomy and connection.

Independence should open more possibilities for a child— not narrow them to one accepted path.

