

Dr. John McGee proposed the use of Gentle Teaching as a non-aversive technique for dealing with people who exhibit challenging behaviours. He was brought to Canada by The Roeher Institute to provide alternative approaches to punishment used and accepted in the past to curtail aggressive and self-injurious behaviour. These included the use of cattle prods, noxious substances, and physical and mechanical restraints. Gentle Teaching focuses on three main assumptions:

1. A human being has inherent value that is not contingent upon productivity or behaviour;
2. A person's participation with another person has value that is not linked to, nor contingent upon, the person's ability to complete a structured task;
3. Human interaction is reciprocal in nature and people can be taught a process of reciprocity.

These assumptions are based upon the idea of bonding and friendship that is typified by trust and security. McGee sees bonding and friendship as the bases for a relationship between a person and the caregiver. It is through our relationships with others that we work past a person's challenging behaviour. Our desire for changing a person's behaviour is secondary to the care and respect we have to show for the individual. Developing a trusting relationship is specific to each person and the relationship is not transferable to other caregivers. Each caregiver must make his own bond with the person.

We attended a week-long workshop in Nova Scotia on Gentle Teaching and began to think that Sue could benefit from this alternative approach. It was our hope that by offering a workshop at the school, and by involving the people closely associated with Sue, we might be able to get beyond Sue's aggressive behaviour to a point where we could establish meaningful interactions with her.