**The Trampoline\***

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**A. Composition:**

Components: Tubular steel legs & frame; 250+ springs; rubberized mat.

In this paradigm:

The trampoline represents one’s life relational structure

The springs = relationships

One’s level of “bounce” correlates with one’s mental health



**B. Four Sides of the Trampoline:**

Side One: **Primary Family** ~

Mother/father, siblings, spouse, children

Side Two: **Secondary Family** ~

Uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, grandchildren, inlaws

Side Three: **Intimate** **Friends**

Your lifetime collection of precious friends whom you know deeply,   
and who know you deeply

Side Four: **Other** **Friends** ~

Neighbors, work associates, church friends, club friends, etc.

**C. Traits of each side:**

1. **Meaningful** **contact** ~ whenever contact occurs it is meaningful (not incidental) to both parties ~ contact could be regular, but not necessarily.
2. **Mutual** **investment** in one another ~ both parties are invested in one another, even if there’s a cost
3. **Equality** and **symmetry** (one’s neither rescuing nor in any way subservient to the other ~ there is relative equality within the relationship)
4. Relationship is consistently **positive** & **encouraging**

**D. Life’s Trampoline Balance**

1. Emotionally healthy people usually have **5 – 6** relationships on **each** side, for a sum total of **20 - 25** *meaningful* relationships (springs) in their lives. Some have many more, and some have a few less. Most of these people know one another, or at least know *of* one another.
2. When the relationships on one side are weak or non-existent, it is possible to compensate by building more relationships on another side.
3. When Primary Family relationships are damaged, the impact is frequently felt on all sides of the Trampoline. If possible, repair needs to begin at home where the damage initially occurred.
4. When a person has only 10 – 12 total meaningful relationships in their “Trampoline,” these folks tend to be isolated and emotionally unhealthy.
   1. Often, most these friends don’t know one another
   2. Frequently the person feels a sense of isolation and attachment deficit
   3. Frequently the person doesn’t know how to make and keep friends
   4. Frequently the person was wounded in a dysfunctional family system
   5. The more isolated one is, more “odd” the one tends to become
5. When a person has only 4-5 relationships, the relationships tend toward being “caretaking” in nature:
   1. Who’s going to make sure old Harry takes his pills today?
   2. Who’s going to make sure he bathes this week?
   3. Who’ll keep him from getting drunk this weekend?
   4. Who’ll pick him up for church this week?
   5. One’s spouse can become caretaker, which then damages the marital relationship, or reflects interlocking pathologies

**E. Potential meanings of too few springs:**

In the majority of cases, too few springs reflect dysfunctional Family-Of-Origin [FOO] wounds (e.g., rejection, abandonment; abuse) that become controlling functions in adulthood. The following items are reflections of these wounds. There are many more ~ this is just a sampling.

1. Poor social skills, low social I Q
2. Mental disorders
3. Fear of attachment; boundary-related issues
4. Inability to make and sustain attachment
5. Unresolved emotional issues which preclude attachment (e.g., cutoffs, fear, anger, sadness, grief, major losses)
6. Negative attachment modality
7. Low self-esteem; neediness; inappropriate risk-taking
8. Hidden secrets (which may be unintentionally discovered through close relationships ~ e.g., addictions)
9. Learned coping and defense mechanisms hindering attachment
10. Adoption of inappropriate FOO roles (e.g., “The Hero”)

**F. Building A Stronger Trampoline:**

1. Recognize one’s own relational deficit and need for connection
2. Face and resolve boundary issues in Family of Origin (often requires the help of a trained therapist)
3. Determine to overcome one’s fear of attachment ~ risk trusting
4. Establish a plan to form and keep healthy same-sex relationships ~ build Trampoline from same-sex springs, then go slowly into heterosexual relationships
5. Take initiative ~ begin building your own “Trampoline” relationships
6. Make attachment-building into a lifetime habit
7. Goal is to have 16 – 24 *significant* relationships that reflect the four traits outlined in item “C” above. (and preferably closer to 24.)

\* Credit must be given for this paradigm. In his book, “*Bonding*,” (Word, 1985) Dr. Donald Joy titles chapter one, “Who Is Holding Your Trampoline?” This concept stuck in my mind when I first read the book decades ago and I have developed my own thoughts around it, using it in both diagnostics and treatment plans. However, credit for the preliminary metaphor belongs to Dr. Joy.