

Asking For Help

An Important Piece of the Caregiving Puzzle

Jennine Wilson



When I asked people who attend my support groups what came to mind when they heard the words “asking for help,” some of the responses were; “It’s really hard,” “I feel like I am inconveniencing people,” “I don’t think I am worthy of it,” “what right do I have to ask, people are busy with their own lives,” “I should be able to do this on my own,” and “It takes courage and I am shy.”

Why is asking for help so hard? Present society has moved away from, “it takes a village” thinking, to “I need to be independent to be successful.” We have a fear of appearing needy, or incompetent. We have difficulty trusting others to do the “job” right. We experience guilt, especially when the person we care for does not want outside help to come in. It may seem easier to do it yourself to get things in order, than to pass on the responsibility to someone else. Our worry for our loved one makes it is hard to let go of control and we believe it is our lot to bare.

What can help us begin to ask for help?

- Changing our mind set from asking for help as a sign of weakness to asking for help as a sign of strength and a valuable skill.
- Acknowledging you will need help.
- Starting the conversation with the person who will need care right when you know the journey is beginning. Asking who to include in the ongoing conversation.
- Starting small, testing the waters to see how it feels. Practice saying yes to offers.
- Understanding that asking for help is not a selfish act! We are hardwired to help, we are highly social beings and helping others makes us feel good. Give that gift to others.
- Being conscious that people cannot read our minds and will not know what we need unless we tell them.

Write down your needs and share them. People will be grateful. They have been wanting and waiting to know how they can help. You could use the Caregivers NS “Helper Sign Up Sheet.”

- Being open to letting go of control and understanding your way is not the only way.
- Trusting that people will say no if they are unable to help.
- Believing that there is benefit for the person you care for to have a circle and socialize with others.

The caregivers in my support groups who were already receiving help responded; “Don’t wait,” “The sooner you start the easier it is for everyone,” “It gets easier once you start,” “be gracious, grateful and accept,” “it is a great skill to develop,” and “be open to others way of doing things, leaving the house helped with that.”

In my own caregiving journey after months of not having a full night sleep, I finally acknowledged and accepted that I needed help; however, my parents did not agree. In the end I needed to resort to bringing in a counsellor to help convince them. It was not a long conversation. Inviting a counsellor in made them realize the seriousness of my need and accept.

In hindsight I would have started the conversation right when I returned home to be the primary caregiver, involved my siblings to see who I could count on for what, and asked each of my parents’ friends they wanted included in the circle of care. I would have used Caregivers NS “Where to Begin Guide” to facilitate the conversations. I would have researched which care providers I would eventually involve and I would have tried to change my own mindset to asking for help is a strength. Meeting in a place of vulnerability is a powerful place and asking for help is an important piece of the caregiving puzzle.