

Defining The Help You Need©

By Karen Henderson

Independent Aging and Long Term Care Planning Specialist

Founder - The Long Term Care Planning Network

karenh@ltpcplanningnetwork.com

I have heard professionals say over and over: "Why don't caregivers ask for help? Why do they tell us in surveys what they need, and then ignore the services that we develop?" I believe the answer is this: Being a caregiver is like walking a tightrope. As long as you hold on to your pole - your pride, maybe your stubbornness - and maintain your concentration, you may wobble but you will keep your balance and remain upright, physically and emotionally. You don't feel you need help. But as soon as something begins to shift and your pole becomes unbalanced, you start to lose control, you lose your balance and you fall. You still don't ask for help because now you think it's too late to fix the impossible.

It's unfortunate that we don't like to ask for help—most of us have been raised to believe we should be self - sufficient. But there comes a time when asking for help is the smart thing to do, especially if you are a caregiver. It's about survival.

You may say: I am so tired I don't know what I need. Here's how to define the help you need.

1. Create an unemotional list of all the tasks that need to be done
2. Take this master list and group the tasks into categories—personal care, household chores, transportation, advocacy etc.
3. Review the list objectively and honestly; decide which things you enjoy or are able to do, and which things you really dislike doing
4. Now when people ask: How can I help?, you have a list ready to go.

When people offer their help, consider their abilities or interests. If a friend loves to cook, ask for help with meal preparation. People really do want to help, but when they ask, they need direction. Whether it's bringing over a casserole, spending time with dad or researching something you want to know more about, tell them what you need; they will support you.

If a friend or relative turns you down, don't take it personally. Simply say, "Why don't you think about it?" and try asking again at a later time. We all lead busy lives, and the timing may just not have been right.

Remember the old adage: Ask and you shall receive. But you have to ask first! There is no shame in asking for help; in fact, as I have become older I

admire the courage of my friends who have asked me for help. I am there for them and know they will be there for me.

455