

Interdependence: Can You Ask for Help? The Care Receiver's Perspective



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We, as well as our aging family members, want to be in control and live "independently" all our lives. Many of us feisty individuals will do all we can to not ask for help - even if that means taking risks we should not take (climbing ladders, carrying large loads, pruning large trees, etc).

Having had shoulder surgery six weeks ago and experiencing the reality of not being in control and having to ask for help has been a learning experience in patience and an opportunity for creativity. It is most humbling to need help with the simplest of tasks such as putting on socks or opening the refrigerator.

After surgery one expects to need help with some personal care and meal preparation - but the frustration of not getting what you want when you want it just isn't pleasant. Thank God for spouses, adult children, friends and others who lend a hand without complaining and put up with us as grumpy, now "interdependent", individuals.

I have been pondering why it is so hard to ask for help and maybe some of you have answers to this question that I would love you to share with me. But, for me, it means two things: 1) I am bothering someone when I need something 2) I am weak and should be able to do more for myself.

I try to always be grateful, but it is the "before I ask for help" attitude that I don't like in myself. Maybe this attitude I saw in myself is the grumpy attitude that caregivers get from care-receivers in various settings. I think this is the "shadow" side of our personality - the whiny little kid or the princess that expects the other to just read our mind

and know what we need when we need it.

Does anyone have that crystal ball? If so, many of us could use it!

What could we do when we know we will need to be interdependent for a short time or, in the case of a progressive illness, for a much longer time? I suggest that we need to talk about it. We need to be honest that asking for help is hard and to hear from those giving us help or support that it isn't a problem for them. And, if it is a problem, for us to be open to hiring help so both parties get what they need without one feeling like a burden or the other like they're burning out.

In my situation, I happen to have a spouse that never complains, even when he had to get up several times a night to assist me with the ice machine and give medications during the early part of my recovery. In fact, he continues to say he loves me - and I wonder how, when I am not always the most pleasant patient. What I have learned is that the one giving the help is actually showing love and respect. We need to accept this help graciously and always with gratitude - especially because life will give most of us the opportunity to give help back at some time.

It is easier to ask for help now because I can do most things for myself. When I ask for help I usually can wait, so I ask for it when the other is free, but not immediately. In asking for help, if you can say, "could you do XXXXX for me sometime tonight?" It will give both parties more flexibility to give and receive in a more reasonable time frame.

I also learned that before your spouse, partner or parent has a surgery, watch their routine, know what they eat for breakfast, how they like their bed or coffee made, how they dry themselves after a shower. We all differ in our daily routines and if the potential family care provider observes these minor, but

important little things about daily care - it will make those first few days or weeks go smoothly as we embark on "interdependence". This kind of insight can also be helpful to "paid" caregivers.

These experiences always give me examples to use when I'm teaching as well as insight into human nature. We have reluctance to be dependent, not realizing we are always interdependent and independence is actually a fantasy. We are interdependent on so many levels for services and products. We forget that most of us are truly not independent and that we are all mostly interdependent all the time!

Life is very much a classroom and I am fortunate to be able to learn and share lessons from my reluctance and my acceptance in asking for help. And, when the caregiver and receiver know that it's too much for one person, they can show care for each other by calling an agency like Eldercare Services to get help for a few hours a day. Then the help we give is without burnout and given only out of love.

Love is doing what is needed and not so much what is wanted. Both parties in a caregiving and receiving relationship need to keep this in mind. May your next journey into care receiving be filled with positive life lessons and may your next caregiving journey be filled with balance and love.



Our very own Linda Fodrini-Johnson is speaking at the 2013 Aging in America Conference in Chicago, hosted by the American Society of Aging (ASA)! Her topics include: "Preparing Baby Boomers to be Family Caregivers" and "Care Management in the World of Mediation" For more info, visit <http://www.asaging.org/ia>



**Eldercare Services works with Seniors and their families in Walnut Creek, Lamorinda, Alameda County, San Francisco, San Ramon Valley and the Marin County , CA.
Visit us on the web at www.EldercareAnswers.com for more information.**

Community Classes

Walnut Creek

Alzheimer's: 101 & Alzheimer's: 102 For Families Experiencing the Challenge

**3rd Friday of every month from 10 AM to Noon
(Class topic alternates monthly - Classes continue in January)
1808 Tice Valley Blvd., Walnut Creek, CA 94595**

Cost for Classes: None

Class Registration:

Please call at least 3 days ahead

For more information regarding classes and support groups, visit us at www.EldercareAnswers.com or call (925) 937-2018 or email us at Info@EldercareAnswers.com

Support Groups

When concerns for aging family members are part of every day life, or when they interfere with work, your health or other relationships, you need to join a support group.

Caring for An Aging Family Member

**2nd Thursday of every month from 7 to 8:30 PM
1808 Tice Valley Blvd., Walnut Creek, CA 94595**

**1st Thursday of every month from 5:15 to 6:45 PM
Glen Park Library, 2825 Diamond St., San Francisco**

Cost for Support Groups: None

Support Group Registration: Not required

More Info: (925) 937-2018 or (415) 469-8300



Eldercare Services provides Counseling, Support Groups, Home Care, and Care Management to aid Family Caregivers. If you or someone you know could benefit from self-care, give us a call at (866) 760-1808 or email us at Info@EldercareAnswers.com.