



How Can I Support My Supportee? Brainstorm Worksheet

INTRODUCTION

For many of us it can be very challenging to ask others for help. This can be particularly true for individuals navigating chronic illness. They often struggle with feelings of guilt, shame, embarrassment, and a sense of “being a burden,” making asking for help even more difficult. As a support person, taking time to brainstorm specific ways you are willing and able to help your supportee can be incredibly helpful on both sides of the relationship. This is also a great activity to share with other people who want to help.

INSTRUCTIONS

As you complete this worksheet, try to be as specific as possible. For instance, perhaps you are able to help with a quick errand like returning books to the library, but you are unable to commit to a more time-consuming task like grocery shopping—so instead of simply writing “I can help by running errands,” specify by documenting, “I can help by running errands that take 30 minutes or less.”

BRAINSTORM

Practical Support: Think about what type of practical support you are able to realistically offer your supportee. Practical support may encompass things such as:

- Running errands
- Driving (i.e., “chauffeuring”)
- Prepping meals
- Going to medical appointments
- Doing household chores
- Caring for a child or pet

Emotional Support: Think about what type of emotional support you are able extend to your supportee without sacrificing your own needs. Emotional support may include:

- Authentically listening
- Providing emotional validation
- Being a source of positivity
- Extending empathy (not sympathy)
- Providing a "judgement-free zone"
- Giving physical affection (e.g., a hug, shoulder rub, hand squeeze)

Outreach Support: Think about how you can leverage your own network, personal time, and resources to help share your supportee's story. Things to think about include:

- Personal social media platforms on which you are willing to share your supportee's story
- Organizations, clubs, groups, or forums you belong to where you might be able to share your supportee's story
- "Third-party connections" you may be able to leverage to extend your supportee's reach (e.g., your sister-in-law works for a billboard company, a friend from college writes for a newspaper, your neighbor has a huge social media following and might be willing to share a post)
- Outreach activities you would like to engage in, organize, or facilitate on your supportee's behalf (e.g., getting a magnet for your car, passing out flyers, wearing a t-shirt, hosting a fundraiser)

Skills Sharing: Think about any skills you have that may be helpful to your supportee. These may be specific to outreach efforts or more generalized to navigating life with chronic illness. Things to consider include:

- Social media skills
- Writing skills
- Speaking/presenting skills
- Graphic design or web design skills
- Research skills
- Event organization skills

Other Helping Ideas:

MAKE AN OPEN OFFER

After you complete your brainstorm, set aside time to share it with your supportee. Let them know you spent time thinking about ways you can help because you authentically care, want to be supportive, and hope that knowing you have carefully thought things through will aid them in accepting your offers. Keep in mind that your gesture may be emotionally overwhelming for your supportee. Be prepared to allow space for them to “feel their feels.” Also considering providing your help list in a written form they can refer back to later. Let your supportee know that the offer is open and they can ask for help at any future time.

FOLLOW-UP

Lastly, take the initiative to follow up. Even after a clear and heart-centered offer to help has been made, it can still be challenging for your supportee to accept assistance. While there is a fine line between being diligent and being pushy, if some time has passed and your mentee has not enlisted your help, it maybe be useful to gently remind them that your offer still stands and will continue to remain open. Following up reemphasizes the sincerity of your offer, reminds your loved one that you truly want to help, and encourages them to reach out.