

What Kind of Support Do I Need?

INTRODUCTION

People in your life often want help, but don't know how they can be useful unless you tell them. Although it can feel vulnerable and uncomfortable at first, learning to ask for help is an important aspect of self-advocacy. Enlisting your family, friends, and communities as helpers gives you more energy to put toward caring for your health and seeking a living donor. Brainstorming to gain clarity around specific ways people can help makes it easier to accept an offer or solicit support.

BRAINSTORM

Practical Support: Think about what type of practical support would be helpful to receive. Practical support may encompass things such as:

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

Emotional Support: Think about what type of emotional support you would like to receive. Emotional support may include:

- Being authentically listened to/heard
- Spending time with someone positive
- Being provided a "judgement-free zone"
- Receiving emotional validation
- Receiving empathy (not sympathy)
- Receiving physical affection (e.g., a hug, shoulder rub, hand squeeze)

Outreach Support: Think about how others can help share your story and need for a kidney and/or what type of resources someone might be able to provide that would be helpful. Some ways others can support your outreach efforts include:

- Posting your story to social media
- Leveraging their personal connections and/or resources to extend your reach (e.g., their sister-in-law works for a billboard company, their friend from college writes for a newspaper, their neighbor has a huge social media following and might be willing to share a post)
- Sharing your story through organizations, clubs, groups, etc.
- Engaging in, organizing, or facilitating outreach activities on your behalf (e.g., getting a magnet for their car, passing out flyers, wearing a t-shirt, hosting a fundraiser)

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

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

GET SPECIFIC

Now that you have generated a list of the type of support you would ultimately like to receive, review your completed Circles of Support worksheet and identify individuals who may be able to provide specific support items from your brainstorm lists.

TIPS FOR ACCEPTING OR REQUESTING HELP

- **Cash in a “raincheck.”** Consider beginning by reaching out to someone who has offered help in the past. It may be less intimidating to ask for support from an individual who has expressed a previous desire—you already know they are likely up for it!
- **Practice readjusting or letting go of expectations.** Many of us are guilty of wanting things done a “certain way,” aka our way, which leaves us tethered to a “If I want anything done right, I need to do it myself” mindset. This rigid way of thinking hinders us not only from asking for help, but also places us in a position to potentially miss out on great ideas and alternative solutions from others. Gently working toward a “Two heads are better than one” outlook can go a long way in terms of accepting help.
- **Be open to letting people choose how they can help.** You might feel an individual in your support circle is well suited to a particular task, but they may disagree. Try providing potential helpers with multiple options/ways they can help. This allows them to choose and engage in supporting you in the way that feels the most comfortable.
- **Embrace the sincerity and positive intent of others.** People ask if they can help because they truly want to. It makes a person feel good to do something positive and useful for someone they care about.
- **Explore your resistance to accepting or asking for help.** What’s behind it? Did your family teach you to be independent and “pull yourself up by your bootstraps”? Are there underlying emotions such as guilt, shame, or embarrassment? Do you fear being a burden? Are you struggling with the shift from being a nurturer, caregiver, helper, or protector to someone who needs support themselves? Giving yourself reflective space to better understand your personal challenges related to accepting or asking for help can provide insight and stimulate meaningful perceptual shifts. A few ways to do this include: talking openly with a loved one, writing/journaling, seeking professional guidance from a counselor or social worker, using creative expression such as art.
- **Embrace vulnerability.** Sometimes to get what we need, we have to sit with emotional discomfort. Thinking about the risk vs. benefit and doing a bit of internal rationalization can help with this piece... “I might feel anxious and nervous to ask Natalie to help me find kidney-friendly recipes, but those feelings will fade quickly and the long term benefits of eating better are worth it.”
- **Asking for help does not mean you are helpless.** In our largely individualistically focused society, it can be easy to forget that humans are in fact social animals. We are designed to live, love, and work together—and to help and support one another. Asking for help does not mean you are helpless, incapable, inadequate, or a burden. It means you are human. We all need help sometimes. Asking for support takes courage and is a sign of strength.