



Caregiver Support Line Presentation - Transcript

Series: Care for the Caregiver

Topic: Goodbye to Going It Alone: Learning to Ask for Help

Hello. I am so pleased that you were able to set aside this time to listen to this presentation. We all know how difficult it can be to take the time to focus on you and your own needs, so we hope this presentation will be a worthy use of your valuable time.

The topic for this presentation is, "Goodbye to Going It Alone: Learning to Ask for Help." I want to start by giving you a bit of an overview that describes how we will focus our time. How many of us have learned that being independent and autonomous is a sign of strength? How many of us have grown to believe that doing for ourselves is a sign of character, and something that we should strive towards?

I hope this group today helps us expand our idea of independence to include recognition that asking for help when we need it is also a sign of real strength. Historically, asking for help may have been seen a weakness or a sign that we're not capable. We hope to challenge this old, outdated way of looking at things.

The ability to recognize our feelings, needs, and struggles, to have the courage and character to ask for help, is one of the characteristics that define strength. The current initiatives in military culture also reinforce this shift in perspective. They now recognize that in order to develop a strong and resilient military it must encourage and develop the same kind of emotional fitness that has been the focus in physical fitness.

Remaining unaware and not caring for your emotional wellbeing will most certainly leave you vulnerable, whereas paying attention and taking these needs seriously, is as powerful as physical strength and fitness.

Let's start by looking at how you know when you need help.

In order to first get the help that you need, you have to first notice that you are in need and that you are struggling somehow. You may have learned not to pay attention to how you are feeling or have learned that it isn't okay to notice your feelings. You may also have learned that it isn't okay to need something or to ask for a need to be met.

In your role as Caregiver you may feel the pressure to accomplish everything for yourself. Your own feelings can provide you direction and an answer to the question



about whether you need help. Being able to take your, “emotional temperature,” is an important tool in knowing when to ask someone for help.

Let’s take a moment now to identify how you are feeling, right now, today.

You may be feeling frustrated or overwhelmed. You may be feeling well rested and content today. You could be confused or anxious.

Taking the time to notice your feelings and name them is a good practice. Paying attention to your feelings can help you recognize how they are impacting your life, and as a result, what action may be needed to care for them.

It may be easier for some people to identify the physical symptoms or the behaviors that reflect that feelings are building up. For example, you may notice having a lot of headaches, or have trouble sleeping. Maybe you are snapping at your loved ones or find yourself not having any energy to do the things you like. These can all be signs, warning signs, that your emotional temperature is reaching a boiling point.

Now mind you, in this fast paced world we live in with all the demands on us, it sure can be tough really keeping up with all the feelings and needs. They can pile up before you notice, “Wow, I really am a bit short or crabby,” or “Holy cow, I am just exhausted.”

What really counts is that you can finally notice, and that you have the strength and awareness to pay attention and take it seriously now. That’s what can make all the difference in building your emotional resilience and strength.

One way to begin to build the skills of attending to our emotions is to practice some specific skills. I will name these skills: recognition, investigation and acceptance.

Let’s start with the recognition. Recognition is just that - noticing, paying attention, and naming the feelings as they arise

By recognizing or “naming” the emotion, we improve our self-awareness and with this awareness, we are less likely to just fall into a full blown reaction.

Once we are aware, once we recognize and name the feeling, we can then make some choices about what we will do with that feeling. If our feelings are trying to tell us something important, it is important to listen to them. You don’t have to wallow in them, but listening matters.



The second part of the equation, is investigating the feeling. When investigating emotions, we are intentionally exploring and being curious about how it arose.

Sometimes, especially if we are really flooded with a feeling, it is helpful to bring an investigative mind, as if you were sitting on your shoulder and looking at a situation from all sides.

Bringing an observing mind to your emotional experience can really help you not only understand the feeling, but also help to put things in perspective and make your actions less reactive and irrational. Your reactions may become more purposeful and productive.

Next, one of the most helpful choices one can make in managing feelings once you have come to recognize and investigate them, is coming to acceptance. Acceptance means not fighting the feeling, not trying to change it, ignore it, or argue it away. With practice accepting the emotion allows it to simply fade away naturally.

By accepting your emotions, you are actually taking some of the steam or energy out of the emotion so that moving forward your actions are less reactive and sounder. Emotions are short lived experiences if we simply recognize, not deny, or resist accepting them. Let this process help inform you about what you need, and what you may need to ask for.

Once you have processed your emotions, you may have realized or identified that you need to ask for help. While asking for help is a necessary part of caring for yourself, we do understand that it is not always comfortable to name your needs. You may worry that even if you do ask, you will not receive any relief.

Some of the barriers that people encounter when asking for help may be that you have been refused or turned down in the past, or that it is humiliating or makes you feel too vulnerable. Maybe you are too tired or frustrated to reach out, or maybe you just don't know who to turn to.

Sometimes just being emotionally overloaded may contribute. Many times feelings of frustration or anger can accompany stress and then it may become more difficult to think about asking for help.

Sometimes we act upon what we "should, could or would" be expected to do, as opposed to what we feel is manageable or realistic for us.



These are just some of the thoughts that are powerful invisible barriers that keep us resistant to seeking help.

You may have heard the quote, “No man is an island.” Well it’s true. I don’t know any human being in the course of a lifetime that has not relied on or needed the help or care of someone at some point in their life.

Being aware of your own thoughts about asking for and accepting help can be half the battle. We won’t pretend that tomorrow you will all wake up and feel comfortable deciding to ask for help, but if you can recognize your self- talk you can work towards eliminating that barrier.

These rigid ideas only serve to keep you trapped in an unnecessary position where your own wellbeing is compromised.

Can you remember a time when you may have been so emotionally taxed you just got more intensely focused on, “I will do it myself,” instead of stepping back, slowing down and saying, “Wow I need to get some help with this.”

These beliefs can cause you to have many feelings about not living up to the imposed expectations that you or others have of you. Simply taking off the heavy coat of others’ expectations and moving forward with your own determination of what you feel is right, will help you let go of this barrier

It’s easier said than done to try to “stop” feeling guilty, weak or some of the other feelings mentioned as barriers. Being responsible for your own choices is the best way to dump the guilt bucket, or the burden of others’ expectations.

Practice asking, and maybe at first you will have to “fake it to make it,” meaning we may have to experience the uncomfortable feelings, to push through them, even as we reach out. The important point is to make contact and ask for the help you need.

Another barrier that may have an influence on one asking for help would be expecting there is no help available. This expectation sets us up predicting without facts, meaning we think we already know the answer to our question, when many times we do not!

Sometimes we try to avoid the risk of asking for help by just expecting or assuming someone should help out. Just as you may believe others have expectations of you that are burdensome or unfair, silently assuming how someone else should be expected to help you is unfair



We can't ever really know what a fair expectation is for another person. We can only ask for what we need. If they cannot meet that request, it is simply their right and their choice to determine what they are willing to do or give. We can only take the risk to ask and then assume each person has the freedom to decide from there what they are able to do.

The important thing is to try to let go of the expectations and assumptions, and just ask.

Sometimes you run in to trouble asking because you don't know who to ask, or because you don't know how to ask.

One of the first steps is to clearly identify what it is you really need right now.

Is it a physical resource like food, money, or an item? Perhaps you need information on how to access services, or what services can help you. It could be that you need a break. Maybe you just need someone to listen to you. By identifying the need you have right now, you can be clear and direct in asking.

If you are specific and clear, then you are giving the other person the ability to decide if this is something they could help with.

Planning to care for our needs is one way to recognize and respect ourselves. If we don't pay attention to these needs, they will get our attention in potentially negative ways, like becoming sick or feeling burned out.

Once you have identified what you need, the next step is to identify who you might ask.

There may be a few things to consider when asking someone for help. One consideration may be identifying the type of help you are looking for and who may be best able to provide it.

It is important to network with your friends, family, or VA staff so that you will have a choice of people and a choice of skill sets to turn to when you need them.

Identifying people to ask for different types of help is important. Be prepared for this, and make a list of people you can turn to for help and keep this handy!

Your list could have different options such as family members, friends or neighbors, church, synagogue, community agencies or groups that you belong to or that you know are available. Don't forget to include VA staff members.



It could be your Caregiver Support Coordinator or the Caregiver Support Line, to help you identify a resource in your area.

So, you can see that there are a lot of different ways to look at your list.

If you find yourself having trouble making a list, that's a great opportunity to ask for help! For something like that you might contact your Caregiver Support Coordinator or the Caregiver Support Line to help you think outside the box. Continue to brainstorm with an open mind the many potential sources of support that you might add to your expanding list of much needed sources of help.

Once your possible supports are identified, the next thing you want to look at is how you might ask in a way that provides all parties the opportunity to save face. What we mean by this is finding a way to ask for your needs to be met in a way that provides each person, you and the person you are asking, the opportunity to not feel on the spot or quite so pressured or quite so vulnerable.

You can find ways to ask for things that just reflect you are simply making a request, like you were requesting someone pass you the salad at the dinner table. Remember, it simply is really a request, not an admission of profound weakness.

We know asking for help can feel difficult but there may be ways to make it feel less like we are putting ourselves or someone else on the spot. One thing to consider when asking for help that can be effective is to give the other person an "out."

For example:

"Hi Mary, I have a medical appointment on Monday and need someone to sit with Chuck for about 2 hours. I know you may be busy but was wondering if you might be available to sit with him while I go to the appointment. Certainly if you can't, I totally understand."

Or

"Mary, I am trying to get some time out of the house and am trying to set up some supports that might help me do that. I am looking for any friends that might feel comfortable staying with Chuck for a 2 hour time frame over the upcoming month so I might get a break. There's no need to give an answer now. Just give it some thought, and if you are able that is great. Just let me know when would work for you. If you aren't comfortable or aren't able to help in this way, don't worry, I understand."



You need to be prepared that sometimes the person you have identified will not be available or they may be unable to provide the kind of help you are asking for. In those times, it is important to maintain flexibility and move to the next person on your list that may be able to fulfill that need.

Also if someone doesn't feel comfortable, let's say sitting with the person to provide care, you can also just let them know that you are struggling and what you are struggling with.

They may not be able to sit with your loved one but if they hear how tough it is getting to the grocery store or making meals or getting the yard work done, they may pitch in another way.

Let people know what you are struggling with so that you are opening up the conversation for them to help in other ways.

So, if the person says, "No I can't sit on this day." Let them know you understand and then just share a bit more. "I understand that you can't stay with Chuck then, I am just trying to manage caring for him and also caring for myself. It's hard even to get out to the grocery store lately. Really it's hard to get much of anything done." Sharing your struggle and needs with others opens up the opportunity for them to support you in the way they are able.

Well, we have covered a lot of important ground!

We have looked at building your awareness and attention to your own feelings, using your mental skills of observation to get perspective, and identifying what your feelings might be telling you about what you may need.

We then looked at what kinds of beliefs, emotions, and expectations can be a barrier to asking for help.

We discussed developing an ever growing resource list of supports.

And finally, we looked at how you can be clear and specific in asking for what you need, offering an opportunity for everyone to save face and at the same time providing enough information about your struggle to open up opportunities for your supports to offer assistance in whatever way they are able.

Most important of all, is to know it is absolutely okay to ask and that by asking, you are simply making a request. You are not showing a weakness.



Again, asking for help is a vital skill in recognizing your needs and maintaining your own personal emotional fitness and strength. We hope that this has encouraged you to take seriously your need for care and attention. We also hope that you will also be encouraged to put your voice to your feelings and needs, and provide the same loving care to yourself that you give to others.

Let's say goodbye to going it alone! We are here for you and we support you!

I hope you found this presentation a worthy use of your time. Thank you for listening. If you are a Caregiver of a Veteran and would like to discuss any of the ideas offered during this presentation, I invite you to contact your local Caregiver Support Coordinator. You may also contact a social worker at the Caregiver Support Line at 855-260-3274. Thank you for all you do.