

Support Group Discussion Guide: It's Okay to Ask For Help



*This support group kit was created with support from Celera Systems.
We thank them for their generosity!*

Table of Contents

Purpose.....	3
Ice Breaker.....	4
Introduction to Topic.....	5
Objectives.....	6
No Matter What Video.....	7
Video Discussion Prompts.....	8
12 Tips for Asking for Help.....	9
Activity.....	11
Resources.....	12

Purpose

The purpose of this session is to help us better understand that it is normal *and* *expected* to need help with the challenges we will encounter parenting relative or like kin children. Often the transition comes about with little or no time to plan. Add to that the complicated relationship navigation and stigma involved in relative caregiving, and it can make it that much harder to ask for help when it's needed. **Everyone** needs help sometimes. Getting comfortable with reaching out not only helps you and the children in your care, but it is good for the “helpers” as well.



The hope is that this discussion guide will provide prompting for safe and non-judgmental exploration of issues we're facing and help give voice to the very real, normal, and understandable feelings we all struggle with. You are encouraged to share strategies and resources you have discovered as we offer hope and encouragement to one another.

Ice Breaker



A Time When You Helped Someone (10-15 minutes)

Ask participants to share a time when they helped someone in need. Often, we hesitate to reach out for help because we don't want to put someone out or admit that we need help. In actuality, people love to share their expertise and feel needed.

An Example:

"After a rough day at work, I had to stop at the grocery store. In the checkout line, I watched a young mom in front of me trying to keep her three little girls together while unloading her cart. The littlest was crying, and another took off running toward the balloons in the floral department. The mom looked frantic. I told her I would gather up the runaway while she continued checking out. She was in tears when I returned with her little girl in tow. We walked together to the parking lot, and she explained that her husband had passed shortly after they relocated to this area. She said she knows no one here and has been struggling. In talking, we discovered we live in the same apartment complex. I gave her my number and offered to help out while she does the shopping once a week. When I got home, I realized I was no longer focused on my bad day and was actually feeling great that I could help *her* with hers."

Objective:

This icebreaker is intended to help participants get over any stigma surrounding asking for help and understand that people are as enriched by helping as the recipient of the help.

Introduction to Topic

It's okay to ask for help. You are not alone.

Parenting is one of the hardest jobs there is. Parenting someone else's child can make you doubt everything you thought you knew, yet asking for help can be tough. Rest assured, you're not alone. There's actually a psychological reason why we all struggle with asking for help: we are hardwired to be independent and to want to do things on our own.



In this session, we're going to explore our feelings about the challenges we face as relative caregivers and how to get better at asking for the help we need and deserve.

In the video included in this session, a foster parent who grew up in foster care admits that fostering shook her confidence in her decision-making and parenting abilities. Despite her own lived experience and her belief that she was going to be "really amazing at it," trying to do it without help literally brought her to her knees.

Objectives

This session will help us better understand:

- No one can do it alone.
- It's normal to be overwhelmed when we feel ill-equipped to handle our current situation.
- It's okay not to feel perfectly confident, especially when parenting a child who has experienced trauma and loss.
- We are surrounded by willing help and support.
- Asking for help builds connections by allowing others to share their resources, skills, or information and feel needed.
- Asking for help benefits not only the caregiver and child(ren) but the helper as well.

No Matter What Video: It's Okay to Ask For Help

In this video, foster mom Magdalia shares the importance of reaching out to the people in your life, even if they don't completely understand that challenges caregivers face.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iESyohqrffY>

Click link to play video

It's Okay to Ask For Help Discussion Prompts

Reactions

1. Are there any thoughts, feelings, or reactions this video clip brings up for you?
2. If you could say something to Magdalia to be supportive, what would it be? Would you be receptive to that message if someone said it to you?

Challenges

1. What are your criteria for knowing when it's time to ask for help?
2. What would prevent you from asking for help when help is needed?
3. Have you had opportunities to express these feelings in a safe, supportive space?
4. Do you have people in your life offering to help? Do you take them up on it or insist you're "okay?" Why?

Strategies & Success Stories

1. What types of help have you used that might be useful to the rest of the group?
2. Do you have a story to share about the positive outcome of asking for help?
3. How does it make you feel when you've helped someone else?

12 Tips for Asking for Help

Asking for help can be uncomfortable, especially when you're used to being the helper. The following tips offer suggestions for making it easier.

Tip #1:

Practice asking by starting small. Ask friends if they are aware of trustworthy resources related to your need. This will open the door to the conversation about what you are needing and give them the opportunity to offer help.

Tip #2:

Start with those who have offered help, even if you've turned it down in the past. They wouldn't have offered if they weren't happy to lend a hand. This will help build your confidence and provide assurance that people are happy and willing to help.

Tip #3:

Create a list of the different types of assistance you need (e.g., a babysitter twice a month, help with transportation on days you're double booked). This gives the helper a clear idea of your needs and allows them to offer help for the things they are most comfortable with.

Tip #4:

Let people know you understand if they don't have the capacity to help at this time. Offering reassurance that you won't take it personally helps avoid creating awkward feelings on both sides. Being turned down may just mean they are dealing with their own overwhelm at the moment.

Tip #5:

Reach out to community resources such as your place of worship, social service agencies, therapists, caregiver support groups, or local/national caregiver organizations.

Tip #6:

Offer a trade or share tasks if you are able (e.g., "Can Sally ride with you to soccer practice? I can do pickup after."). You may be just the help THEY are needing as well.

12 Tips for Asking for Help (continued)

Tip #7:

Don't feel a need to explain why you need help beyond what you're comfortable sharing. (See suggestions for starting the conversation on the next page.)

Tip #8:

If you ask for help in a vague way, you likely won't be happy with the result. Be as specific as you can by asking something like, "I need someone to watch the kids from 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm on the third Tuesday of the month for the next two months. Any chance you'd be available and interested?"

Tip #9:

If guilt or embarrassment tries to creep in when asking for help, repeat to yourself, "No one can do everything alone. I'm doing what is best for the children in my care."

Tip #10:

Accept that asking for help is a strength, not a weakness. And remember, it makes people feel good to know they can help.

Tip #11:

School secretaries can be a great source of information! They are often aware of a variety of resources including tutoring help, after-school programs, carpools, and community programs and events (like school supply drives or meal programs). They may also be aware of other families in the school community that could be a great resource for you.

Tip #12:

Don't overlook professional help for the kids and you. Therapists and counselors can not only provide help in coping with all the thoughts and emotions that come with relative caregiving, but they can also provide you with an impartial sounding board, resources, and referrals.

Activity: Putting Together a Team of Helpers

Activity:

Create a plan for lining up help before you need it.

Start by making a list of the people you would be most comfortable asking for assistance when needed, This may include friends, neighbors, other relatives, your child's school, or even parents of your child's friends. Don't forget community-based organizations and your place of worship as well. Many have programs to assist foster and kinship families.

Questions to consider:

- Who are the people the kids identified as someone they have a good relationship with and would like to spend time with?
- If asking for babysitting or respite, who would you most trust with the care of children? Who is good with kids and genuinely enjoys them?
- Who are people who have been comfortable enough to ask you for help and who would likely be happy to return the favor?
- Whom do you know that loves volunteering and/or enjoys feeling useful?
- What types of help are you asking for?

A Sample Script for Asking for Help

"You may have noticed my grandkids are staying with me for a bit. I see your kids go to the same school. I'm wondering if you would be interested in carpooling. I'm happy to do the drop off in the morning if you would be available for pick up. This will free up a bit more time for both of us each day, plus I know my grandkids love to see your kids in the morning."

Resources

Additional Coalition Resources

- [Resources for Relative Caregivers](https://wifostercareandadoption.org/resources/for-relative-caregivers-2/)
(<https://wifostercareandadoption.org/resources/for-relative-caregivers-2/>)
- [Wisconsin Kinship Navigator Guide](https://wifostercareandadoption.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/kinshipnavigatorguide7finalweb.pdf)
(<https://wifostercareandadoption.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/kinshipnavigatorguide7finalweb.pdf>)

Additional Resources

- [Training Series: Coping With the Unique Challenges of Kinship Care](https://www.aecf.org/blog/training-series-coping-with-the-unique-challenges-of-kinship-care)
(<https://www.aecf.org/blog/training-series-coping-with-the-unique-challenges-of-kinship-care>)
- [How to Ask for Help With Childcare](https://www.verywellfamily.com/how-to-ask-for-help-with-childcare-4845829) (<https://www.verywellfamily.com/how-to-ask-for-help-with-childcare-4845829>)
- [Five Ways to Help Kin Caregivers Now](https://www.aecf.org/blog/five-ways-to-help-kin-caregivers-now) (<https://www.aecf.org/blog/five-ways-to-help-kin-caregivers-now>)
- [Kinship Care Resource Kit for Community and Faith-Based Organizations](https://www.childrensdefense.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/kinship-care-organization-resource-kit.pdf)
(<https://www.childrensdefense.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/kinship-care-organization-resource-kit.pdf>)
- [Wisconsin Kinship Navigator](https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/kinship/navigator) (<https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/kinship/navigator>)
- [Grandfamilies.org](https://www.grandfamilies.org/) (<https://www.grandfamilies.org/>)
- [Kinship Care and the Child Welfare System](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f-kinshi/)
(<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f-kinshi/>)
- [Wisconsin GrandFacts State Fact Sheet 2021 Update](https://www.grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/State%20Fact%20Sheets/Wisconsin%20GrandFacts%20State%20Fact%20Sheet%202021%20Update.pdf)
(<https://www.grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/State%20Fact%20Sheets/Wisconsin%20GrandFacts%20State%20Fact%20Sheet%202021%20Update.pdf>)