

Article - Just Ask

“Don’t worry about me, I’m fine...”

...changing our rules to change our lives.

Until you take on the role of family caregiver, you really don’t know what it means – the effect it has and will have on every aspect of your life. One issue that family caregivers truly do not know until they’re ‘in it’ is the isolation they can experience - both physical and emotional. If we reflect honestly, we know that in varying degrees, each of us plays a role in the creation of that isolation. The good news is that we have the amazing power to change isolation into connection simply by changing our rules.

Most of our life choices are based on our values and strongly held beliefs about the way to live. Often we live those values exactly as we learned them as children. We seldom give them a second thought. For us, these things just ‘are.’ As many of us take on caregiver roles in our 40s, 50s and 60s, however, we begin to discover that some of these values and the rules that support them continue to serve us well - and some do not.

Do you have values and beliefs formed in childhood that create isolation and disconnection instead of association and connection? My family of origin placed high value on independence and rugged individualism. To “just ask” for help seemed fairly simple until I was the one asking. My rule: Others can and should ask for help, of course, but I shouldn’t. That ‘rule to live by’ supports the value of independence and the belief that we can do just about everything on our own. Asking for assistance is something others do. Here’s the self-talk: “My family and friends should know what I’m going through and offer support. I’ll just wait for that to happen. I don’t need to hire someone to help me. I can tolerate this exhausting and challenging situation a bit longer.” Sound familiar?

Well, if you believe asking for help is tough, consider receiving. Whew!

Those of us who have a problem asking also can have issues with receiving. We’re trained to give and to be the ones to provide care. When it comes time for us to be the recipient, our brains spin out thoughts that confirm feelings that, somehow, we’re lesser if we seek and accept assistance.

How do we change this lifetime of training? To begin the positive cycle of asking and receiving, we must be aware of the issue and, then, focus on why we must change. Explore what is lost if we do not change (our health, our relationships, our love of life, the pure joys of this experience...). Better yet, explore what is gained if we do change (our health, our relationships, our love of life, the pure joys of this experience...)! Then, just make a simple choice to ask for assistance. When you take that first step, however tiny, everything changes. By reaching out and asking, even once, you already have broken down some of the walls of long-held beliefs and behaviors. You are on your way to identifying and examining and consciously deciding which of the hundreds, the thousands, of ‘rules to live by’ that you created are the ones to keep. Just a simple choice - and that first asking can make all the difference.

To make this learning stick, choose to be around people who encourage and support you and your valuable contribution. Just one nourishing person can keep you on track and remind you of your value and of the positive choices you're now making. And when you have two, or three, or more of these folks who feed you emotionally and provide positive support, you're well on your way to the wonderful ascending spiral of asking for and receiving the help you need to do your vital giving work.

Do you need a caregiver to provide respite care? Do you want someone to clean your house or prepare a meal? Would you like to get a chair massage? Does a quiet in-home retreat sound like a needed break for you?

Reach out and ask for needed help and support, whatever that looks like to you. Tell others what you need. Allow them to help you and to support your important role as a caregiver. Accept their gifts of energy and time. And express your gratitude through your healthy continuing contribution of loving care.

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