

LEARNING to ASK for HELP

An Excerpt from Nurturing the Soul of Your Family

We all need support — lots of it. We weren't meant to do everything for ourselves. Assess how you currently navigate challenges: Do you immediately isolate, put on your armor, grab your sword, and head out into the forest to slay the dragon alone? Or do you enlist the help and strategic counsel of other knights and soothsayers who have already weathered similar challenges? What is your typical response to feeling stressed, overwhelmed, and isolated?

Next, consider all the ways you could ask for the help you need. What do you do now that you could do more often, or what new steps could you take? Regardless of the challenge — whether it involves parenting, your career, or a relationship issue — consider expanding your concept of what it looks and feels like to receive support.

Here are a few ideas on how to ask for and receive help in our everyday lives:

- Let your boss know you're overextended at work and you're concerned this will effect the quality of your work. Specifically, you can ask for help prioritizing tasks, request additional staff support, or tap coworkers for help or ideas on how to streamline processes or tasks.
- Cultivate an existing friendship, or create a support group that will meet your specific needs.
- Ask a neighbor, another mom or dad, or a single friend to watch your child when you need help. Don't feel like you have to reciprocate; just practice receiving. If a friend or neighbor has offered help in the past, don't be shy about taking them up on it.
- Reach out to a career, leadership, or business coach for support on making a career change or navigating a challenging phase in your professional life.
- If you usually handle the cooking, ask your partner to make a meal for the family — and then stay out of the kitchen. Let go!
- If you have a big house chore to handle, like cleaning out your garage or weeding your yard, create a "work crew" of friends. Reward them with a party

afterward, and/or offer to swap house tasks the following weekend.

- For family or parenting issues, ask for support and ideas from a parenting educator or coach. Often churches or local nonprofits offer this for free. If you're unsure, ask potential mentors to lunch to get to know them first.
- If you want more emotional or practical help from your partner, set up a date to talk about this and brainstorm ways you could support each other to bring more flow and ease to your days (sometimes you may simply need emotional support).
- Get your kids involved. Ask them to help fold the laundry, vacuum a room, help with dinner prep, or water the plants. Kids are never too young to share in household or family responsibilities.
- Practice saying yes! The next time someone offers you something — to buy you coffee or lunch, to watch your cat, to help you move, and so on — accept the gift, smile, and say thank you!

In our Personal Renewal Groups for women, we designate one entire month for “Building a Support Network.” Because so many of us find it hard to receive without feeling that we have to immediately give in return, the homework challenge is to practice receiving support by “allowing” others to help — picking up the kids, running an errand, mailing a package at the post office, receiving a meal — and not reciprocating. I believe because we're so conditioned to do for others and often put ourselves last, women always find this really difficult. Yet at the same time, they share how deeply rewarding it is to help out and support others just for the joy of it — with no expectation of receiving anything in return. In everyday life, there's nothing wrong with offering to return a favor (“Thanks for watching Scott; I'll be happy to watch Elijah next week”), and most people do this often, but I challenge you to balance this with learning the art of receiving without feeling that you owe the other person a thing.

The more comfortable we become modeling giving and receiving with ease, the more our children will learn to do this, too. It's like building up your support muscle — it takes time and practice.

Maddy, a friend who facilitates our self-renewal circles, once told me she found her four-year-old daughter, Ella, creating a circle on the floor with all of her dolls and

animals propped up on pillows. Ella said proudly, “Look, Mama, they’re having a Personal Renewal Group meeting to help each other!”

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Life balance coach/speaker Renée Peterson Trudeau is president of Career Strategists and the author of the new book *Nurturing the Soul of Your Family*. Thousands of women in ten countries are participating in Personal Renewal Groups based on her first book, the award-winning *The Mother’s Guide to Self-Renewal*. Visit her online at www.ReneeTrudeau.com

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