

Grief Notes

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Getting by With a Little Help by Jane Cornman, Bereavement Coordinator

I once had a friend who loved to tell the story of a time when she wanted to move an enormous dresser downstairs. She was in her early 70's. She tried asking her husband for help, but he was busy doing something else. So instead of waiting for him to be available, she just did it herself. She obviously enjoyed telling the story, which was well rehearsed.



It included bashing the walls with the dresser, almost falling down the stairs and being crushed by the dresser, and ultimately breaking her wrist. If it had been me, I would have been sheepish telling this story. But every time she told it, there was nothing but pride. She had gotten that huge piece of furniture downstairs all by herself! Self-sufficiency was more important to her than protecting her walls, her dresser, and her own body.

I tell this story because I have noticed that grieving people often feel that asking for help is a sign of weakness. Our culture values independence and self-sufficiency so much that people who could use help may feel ashamed. When the story is about an elderly woman injuring herself while trying to do the job of 3-4 strong people, it's obvious that there are good reasons to

ask for help. But when the story is about the dark emotions of grief, people are much less likely to give themselves a break. So, let's be clear: grief is painfully hard work. Emotionally, it is much bigger than trying to move a huge piece of furniture all by yourself. The idea that asking for help is somehow shameful is just plain wrong. There is greater strength in recognizing that you need help and asking for it than there is in hiding your grief and neediness from others for fear of seeming weak.

You may argue that you're not worried about seeming weak – you simply don't want to be a burden to others. But imagine how different the story would sound if my friend's husband had asked to help and she'd refused. We might describe her as stubborn. We might criticize her for not accepting his help and causing all the damage that resulted. Why is the futility of "not being a burden" so obvious when it results in physical damage, but not when the damage is emotional?

If you're grieving, you could use some help. You may need practical help with business-related tasks when you're too foggy to think clearly. You may need help with housework, yardwork, or errands. More deeply, you may need

someone who will be patient with your frequent tears and listen to you with compassion when you need to tell the story over and over again. So, if people want to help you, please let them! If their "help" isn't helpful, kindly explain what you really need. You will quickly be able to sort out who's truly helpful and who's not. Lean on those good helpers. And if a sneaky little gremlin comes along and starts whispering in your ear about how you're weak and a burden, think about this: one day in the future, someone you love will be grieving, and you will want to help them. If they let you, it will be a gift. Likewise, allowing people to help you now is a gift to them. But – you can't pay it forward if you haven't allowed yourself to receive it first.

We know how hard this can be, which is why we offer support through mailings, phone calls, support groups and one-on-one meetings to those who need it. We don't want you feeling that you must navigate this journey alone. If you are struggling with any aspect of your grief, please contact your Bereavement Coordinator. We love to help!

