

# HOW TO THRIVE WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM YOUR FRIENDS

Songs often tell us that a friend will get you through difficult times. True. In fact research often shows social support to be the most important thing that helps us buffer against and cope with many of life's difficult situations. Now however, research also tells us that, in both difficult and normal times, social support is important in helping us pursue opportunities to develop and grow, and therefore to thrive.

A quick reminder that wellbeing includes feeling; competent, autonomous, valued, supported and part of a community, gives some indication as to why social support can be so beneficial to our mental and social health, and in turn, physical health. **But how often and how strategically do we seek and engage the support of others?** My guess is that few of us use it enough. We give it low priority. Our immediate environment gives us limited opportunity. We are embarrassed to ask for support or don't want to bother others. But are we missing out on a simple way of coping, moving on, improving and thriving?

Almost everyone can benefit from receiving (and giving) social support, but the more strategic you are, the more you can gain. So how do you use it effectively? Give the following some honest consideration, and start to plan how you can use social support to help you cope and thrive more effectively.

## HOW TO USE SUPPORT EFFECTIVELY

- 1. Don't Wait:** Ask people if they would support you if needed: Just knowing that support is available is an important predictor of health and wellbeing.
- 2. Engage with social support regularly:** Plan to use it as a matter of course, not a last resort.
- 3. Build a wide and varied support network:** Seek people with different support skills, but ensure that they; are trustworthy, will do what you ask, and treat you as you see your ideal self. Face-to-face support is best, i.e., family, friends, fellow professionals, peer-support groups, charities, or professional support, but with care, social media can be helpful too.
- 4. Match your needs:** Research tells us that the support you seek should depend on a) whether you are experiencing difficult or normal times, and b) your specific needs. Further, that when asking for support, be clear about what you need and why. So again prepare...



**Support for Difficult Times:** To help you buffer against stress and promote your ability to cope and thrive, engage with individuals who can enable you to:

**Have a safe haven:** Allow you to talk, be honest and show emotion, someone who will listen to, understand, accept and reassure you. Also possibly someone who can provide tangible assistance that reduces or shields you from the difficult situation.

**Fortify:** Help you to recognise or develop your existing coping strengths and talents, or to identity and help you to attain new coping skills.

**Reconstruct:** Help you get back on your feet, to use your strengths, to problem-solve. To take positive actions that promote your control, coping and change.

**Reframe:** Help you think differently; to see the situation as less threatening or difficult, or as possible to overcome or of potential benefit.

**Support for All Times:** To help you thrive, your network should include individuals who can help you:

**Nurture a desire to create or seize opportunities to grow:** To encourage you to take initiative, to challenge or extend yourself to take opportunities however big or small. Also, to support your goals and aspirations.

**See Life's Opportunities:** Help you recognise opportunities that you might otherwise not see or dismiss as too difficult, threatening or as likely to fail. To help you see potential benefits and visualise future possibilities, and to recognise that even if unsuccessful, the experience can lead to growth and further opportunities.

**Prepare to Take the Opportunity:** Encourage and help you develop attainable goals and to recognise or develop skills, space and resources. Also to provide feedback, information or tangible support to attain resources.

**Start and Optimise the Opportunity:** Help provide a secure launch pad, providing appropriate support and encouragement, without interfering or becoming too involved. This includes celebrating your accomplishments, encouraging reflection and learning, and helping to fine-tune perceptions, skills and strategies. Also to respond sensitively to setbacks and to ensure that you maintain a healthy balance across important life areas.

## EXTRA SOCIAL SUPPORT TIPS

**5. Support the Supporter:** If they can, people are often willing to give support, but let them know their efforts have been worthwhile. Be receptive and grateful, and check you're not asking for too much.

**6. Maintain a healthy balance of dependence and independence:** You can't thrive through competence and autonomy if you become too dependent. Likewise, beware of any support person who encourages dependency.

**7. Give Support:** With caution, if you already feel that you give too much, but the feeling of giving successful support can have a more profound effect on wellbeing than receiving it. Use the above to give support more effectively. If you work in a team, maybe discuss how you can implement the above together. Remember even small acts of care, e.g., a few encouraging words, recognising skills, are of benefit to you both.

**Remember: Others are important to our wellbeing. Don't wait. Plan and ask others to help you thrive.**



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