



Join the Community or Resist?

The situation you face seems daunting. You need help. Maybe it's help picking up a child or someone to watch her when you're taking another child to a soccer game in the rain. Maybe you need help around the house while you recover from surgery. Maybe you're seeking someone to watch your home while you're away on vacation. Maybe you need some help while you get a new project off the ground. **The question, in any case, is: Where do you turn for help?**



[1]**No matter what kind of help you need, a Personal Safety Nets® solution focuses on the concept of building a community of friends, family, experts, novices, organization members, permanent members and part-timers from which a care-share team can be called to assist when you need it, with different folks involved according to your needs and wants, and their availability.** And, of course, you can be a member of other's teams, too. In an ideal world, it's a give-and-take situation for everyone's betterment.

But what can actually happen to us when someone asks for help in their time of trauma? Psychologists are studying our responses and the findings may shock you. **"Most people cannot tolerate the feeling of helplessness," says Jackson Rainer, professor of psychology at Georgia Southern University.** "And in the presence of another's crisis, there is always the sense of helplessness." **People are sorry to hear of another's crisis, but they are more relieved that the trauma did not happen to them, and this shame causes them to avoid the family or person in crisis.** "They might make sure they're never in a situation where they have to talk to the family directly," according to Rainer.

Awkwardness is another common reaction - not knowing what to say or do. Some say nothing; others blurt out awkward (but well-intentioned) comments. **The more vulnerable people feel, the harder it may be to connect.** "We all live in some degree of terror of bad things happening to us," says Barbara M. Sourkes, of the Stanford University School of Medicine. "Other people's reactions are multifaceted . . . the only certainty is that traumatic events change relationships outside the family as well as within it."

Dr. Rainer calls this self-distancing "stiff-arming" - creating space from "it" happening to you - if bad things are happening to you and I stay away from you, I'll be safe.



[2]But not all of us "stiff-arm." Dr. Rainer explains that true empathy inspires "instrumental aid." There are any number of tasks to be done, and they're as personal as your thumbprint. **If you really want to help a family in crisis, offer to do something specific: drive a carpool, weed the garden, bring a meal, do the laundry, go for a walk."**

So, next time someone asks for your help, or you hear of a friend or family member in need, don't be guilty of



"pseudo-care," asking if you can do anything but not really stepping up. **If you really want to help, try emailing a list of tasks you could do and ask if any of them would be helpful to them. Keep a list of things you like to do handy for your own reference.**

We've provided a list from our workbook, *Personal Safety Nets: Get Ready/Get Started*® that will help you see some of the many tasks that can be offered.

Whether you need help directly, or need help to figure out what assistance to offer, Personal Safety Nets® is here to encourage, support and guide you. ***Take heart, plan now, and don't be guilty of stiff-arming a friend!***

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