

Asking and Organizing

Another kind of knowledge that goes into “strength” is knowing when and how to ask for help...and being able to just do it. Ask!

Effective communication

Our goal is to build a dependable team by communicating clearly and effectively.

Good communicators:

- Are aware of their conversational style and habits
- Know what styles and habits in other people are difficult for them
- Are flexible in their communicating
- Sincerely desire to create shared meaning with others
- Interpret gently

Barriers to good communication:

- Assuming that your style is the right style
- Judging a person’s character based upon his/her communication style
- Being inflexible
- Interpreting other peoples’ meanings as you would your own

Exercise your asking muscles

We all view asking for help differently. Finding out your feelings will help with personalizing your “ask.” Let’s start here:

A. Asking: How does it feel:

To ask and have the person you asked say “yes”?

To ask and have that person say “no”?

B. Receiving: When someone offers help, can you say:

“Thank you. That would be great!”

“That’s really nice, but I don’t think I can accept.”

“I’m sorry you can’t help with that, how about___?”

“That’s OK, can I ask you another time?”

Notes: _____



Quality communication has three components: It's clear, constructive, and consistent.

—Laurence Cohn

C. Declining: When you're asked, how easy is it for you to say a flat-out "no"?

How about "not at this time" or "not that particular thing"?

D. Offering: When you are asked to help, how are you likely to respond?

"Ask me for anything, any time."

"Let me think about that and get back to you."

"You've got some nerve to ask that of me!"

What's your most likely response?

Do you have a range of responses that you're comfortable choosing from, depending on the situation?

Why wait to be asked? Step right in to save the day!

Communication styles

People start off with different assumptions about the world and about relationships. This can lead to differing communication styles.

Type A (sometimes labeled as female):

- See themselves as individuals in a network of connections
- Prefer to be connected
- Might say, "We're close and have much in common"
- Often define role as to help one another

Type B (sometimes labeled as male):

- See themselves as individuals in hierarchical structure of individuals
- Prefer to know who has more or less power
- Often see others as potential threats
- See people as "separate and different"
- Often see their role as protecting someone or something

*He who is afraid of asking
is ashamed of learning.
—Danish proverb*

How can I ask for help?

*All of us need help from time to time. It's good to think
carefully about what you like to do, what you do well,
and what you could most happily offer someone in need.*

Tips for asking for help

- Remember: those who can ask for help are very brave.
- If you ask too late, help will probably come too late. That's how self-fulfilling prophecies develop.
- Ask for more than you need, earlier than you think you need it.
- Expect to get several "no's" before you get a "yes."
- Prepare: if someone says "no," ask if he/she knows of other resources.
- Believe: it's not the ability to pay back that makes you worthy of asking.
- Recognize: asking for help is a sign that you, like all the rest of us, are human.
- Know: most people take pleasure and find life most meaningful when giving help.

Ways to extend invitations

*Here is an example of a two-stage way to ask.
Practice your own way, but practice!*

Stage 1:

Bill, I've read a great new book called *Personal Safety Nets*. Can I take a few minutes and tell you some of the things described in this book? Then perhaps we can discuss some of them.

If Bill seems interested, you may choose to proceed and say this:

Stage 2:

Bill, I'd like to set up a personal safety net team for myself. I'd like to have a discussion with you about what it might look like and how, if interested, you could be one of the members. We can get started now, if you're interested, or we might set a time later, or you may read the book (I've an extra copy I'd be glad to give you) and then we could have a discussion. Do any of these ideas interest you?

Questions:

Would this work for you? Why or why not? What might be better? *Try it out, and practice!*

*“You’ve fallen off your skateboard.
And now your cat DOES need feeding!”*

Email tips for group email to PSN team

The cold, impersonal computer screen and keyboard make it all too easy with email to get right to the point and forget that there are warm, feeling, often frightened, worried people who will be receiving the email. Start slow: tenderly engage these special people in your life. Appreciate and value them, then get to the point. Remember, love, friendship, and appreciation are always a gift to your safety net members.

Give them the details they need to know and make the requests you need. This is often best done after gathering your thoughts, the details and goals. Jot down the who, what, when, how, etc., of the information you wish to convey. Then think about your hopes and fears of how they might respond. Finally, be clear about what you hope they will do with the information: pray, give specific help, stand by, whatever. Write the email and then review your notes and edit as needed. Then send it out.



Managing your own feelings

Many of the activities we suggest in this workbook evoke strong feelings in us. We elaborated in our *Personal Safety Nets* book. Here we'll simply remind you that other people often pick up on what we're feeling. We believe it is part of responsibility as safety net members to repeatedly take stock of our inner experience and emotions. If we're feeling fear, frustration, impatience, annoyance, or anger, we cannot provide the quality of presence, attention, or listening that is most helpful. Being part of someone's safety net provides us with the challenge and unique opportunity to personally and emotionally grow and mature through self-understanding.

Organizing: How to be more prepared

Every day I hear stories that remind me of the value of care teams and the value they give to human life...

—Case manager

You might be thinking, “If only I’d read this before...then we could have organized ourselves and been much more helpful. And not so stressed.” Here are some tools so you and your team will be ready next time.

Making your safety net accessible

Here are some ways to create quick and easy access to your safety net team:

1. Enter all members in your cell phone; add ICE or PSN before each name so they are grouped together.
2. Put all members in your email address book.
3. Make an email group list of your PSN members.
4. Create and carry a phone tree, described on page 27.

Setting up a communication tree

Organization is the key.

In an emergency or a crisis, do you think you will call everyone yourself? Probably not, so:

Who gets called/emailed first?

If you use email, do you have a group email list set up? Think of who’s on it.

- Is there one person who could be in charge of sending messages?
- Is there one tier (everyone who might be interested)?
- Are there several tiers (first the top 3 or 4 contacts, then friends and family who you want to be kept in the loop)?
- Is anyone to be left off?

If you’ve decided who is part of your personal safety net, are their names/numbers given special designation in your database and on your phone?

If you’re phone-based, make a phone tree, making a copy for everyone, so that you, or someone on your inner “A” team, makes only one call—or two at the most, yet everyone is notified.

Notes: _____

Sample email list

Granny's team list: grannyteam@network.com:

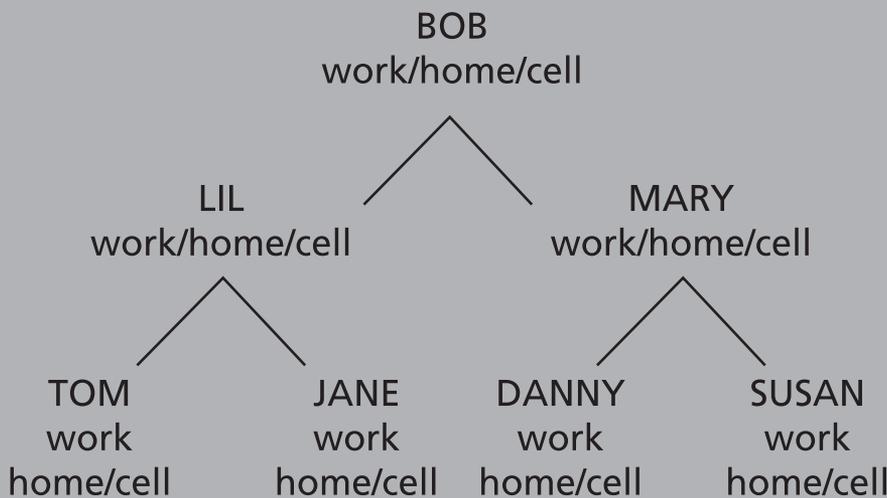
Five names

- Bob: bobtsmith@network.com
- Lil: liligirl@network.com
- Mary: maryjones@network.com
- Tom: tomfarmer@network.com
- Jane: janedoe@network.com



Sample phone tree

Phone trees cut down the work of any one person. To send out information, call the first person on the tree. The first person, in turn, must make contact directly with someone next on the list. Call until you reach someone, then go back to make sure no one is missed. Voice or text messages aren't sufficient unless the message is pretty neutral or routine.



So, if Bob gets the first call, he calls Lil and Mary. But if, say, Lil isn't reachable, Bob calls Tom or Jane. Obviously it is of critical importance that this information be kept current, so the name of the coordinator (in this case, Bob) is on the sheet too.

Personal safety net access backup plan

It is important that at least one other person besides you be able to call your safety net into action or communicate directly with your safety net team in time of need.

Your spouse, partner, best friend, adult child, or person holding Power of Attorney (POA), etc., should have a hard copy of your plan, a phone list, and an email list.

Each member of your team should have a contact sheet or an email group list that includes all members.

Clear, simple, direct, tactful and consistent

When it's time to invite people to be part of your safety network, you'll want to try to be invitational and allow for "no".

Saying "yes!"

There are many ways you can say yes:

"Yes, I can help."

"Yes, I can help this Saturday."

"Yes, I'm not usually available on the weekends, but this Saturday is a rare exception and I can help."

"Yes, I can help this Saturday, but with my new job and my wife's illness, this may be the only time I can help."

Often when faced with a request, we are concerned about choosing "yes." You may be thinking:

"What am I getting myself into?"

"If I say 'yes' this time, will they keep asking?"

"If I say 'yes,' will they become dependent on me?"

Formalizing your safety net

Vera, I've been thinking about being proactive in my life, getting my affairs in order, you know, finally doing my will and such. Anyway, one thing I want is to have someone be my Power of Attorney, to take over my affairs for me if I were incapable. You're my closest, dearest friend, and I like the way you run your life. Would you be willing to take on this responsibility for me?

Sharee, I'd like to ask if you'd be one of the people I really can count on in a pinch. There's nothing going on right now that I know about, but I'm thinking that I'd like to have a network of people who know me pretty well, who know what's going on in my life, and to whom I can turn. Vera has said she'll be my Power of Attorney, and Quentin is there as backup. But I'd like to have two or three other people close by, and you're one of them. It's OK to say "no," but would you consider doing this for me? If so, we can set aside time to talk about more details.

Phillip, my mom is getting older. You've been a friend of hers for many years, and I know she sort of depends on you. Since you and she live far away from me, I'm wondering if you'd be willing to have me put you on a list of people I could call if she needs help?



Five Web sites for keeping up to date with far-flung support groups:

www.carepages.com

www.caringbridge.com

www.supportteam.org

www.familynetwork.org

www.lotsofhelpinghands.com

When you've been asked to take part in holding someone's safety net, there are many ways in which you might respond. Here are a few possibilities.

Responding to an invitation

- Yes, I'd like to learn more about your personal safety net.
- Yes, I'd like to keep talking. This sounds like something I should know about.
- No. I like the idea and value our relationship, but I'm overextended right now. Can we put this off for a while? I'd like to get a copy of the book though. Where can I find it?
- Please take me off the list. I've no idea who you are!

Saying "no"

"I would really like to but . . ."

"I don't know what to say. I feel awkward, but that's something I just don't feel I can do."

"Another day would be fine, but today won't work."

"What I'm hearing you say is _____, and you may need to talk . . ."

Hearing and understanding "no" replies

"No" can be painful to hear. Many of us have developed a strong reaction to "no" based on our own disappointments and hurt when we've been on the receiving end. While we cannot totally control how someone will react to our words, we can learn ways to express "no" that will reduce the likelihood that the other person will feel hurt.