

H-E-L-P. Four simple letters, yet one of the most difficult words in the English language to say.

From a young age, children are told to “shake it off”, “let it go”, or “get over it”, when they experience minor physical or emotional pain. These messages can come from parents, teachers, coaches, siblings and friends. But what do these messages really teach *our* children? Do they model compassion? Do they make them feel valued? Do they help them feel supported, safe and protected? The answer is no. Instead, they have a profound effect on children’s future willingness to seek help when it’s needed.



A 2009 study involving over 600 Israeli 10th through 12th grade students found that despite the perceived benefit of asking for help, most adolescents preferred to cope with problems on their own. And their perceived ability to handle their own issues may have become an obstacle to seeking assistance.

Likewise, a 2012 study of teens with suicide ideations found that only one-third reported trying to get help and approximately one-quarter reported disclosing their feelings to an adult. This underscores the need to strengthen factors encouraging suicidal adolescents to seek help (DeLuca & Wyman, 2012).

So, why is it difficult for young people to ask for help? Is it that they are too embarrassed or self-conscious to do so? Do they see it as a sign of weakness? Perhaps they feel pressured to return the favor? OR...Maybe it just doesn’t occur to them that it is an option? The truth of the matter is it could be any of these reasons.

Regardless of the reason, *asking for help* does not have to be difficult. Asking for help involves four simple steps...

1. **Look at the person.** Engaging in eye contact with someone when you’re asking for help lets them know that you are serious and sincere.
2. **Ask the person if she has a moment to help you (now or later).** Allowing the person to help you at a time when it is convenient for them, shows them respect. Of course, if the situation is an emergency, don’t wait! Call 911!
3. **Clearly describe the problem you are having and the help that you need.** Identifying your problem can require some thought, but being able to ask specifically for what you need allows

the person you are asking to understand your request and take the necessary steps to assist you more quickly.

4. **Thank the person for helping you.** When people go out of their way to support you, it is important to show them gratitude. This increases the likelihood that they will help you again if you need it.

Despite the tendency for our young people to see asking for help as a sign of imperfection. Knowing when to seek help, and being able to ask for it appropriately are important skills that they need to grow into well-adjusted and independently successful adults. Taking the time to teach, practice and reinforce these skills while they are still young is a worthwhile endeavor that will pay dividends!

Download a FREE lesson plan on Asking for Help, [here](#). Find more lesson plans in [Tools for Teaching Social Skills](#) in Skills from [Boys Town Press](#).

Raviv, A., Raviv, A., Vago-Gefen, I., & Fink, A. S. (2009). The personal service gap: Factors affecting adolescents' willingness to seek help. *Journal of Adolescence*, 32(3), 483-499.
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De Luca, S.,M., & Wyman, P. A. (2012). Association between school engagement and disclosure of suicidal ideation to adults among latino adolescents. *Journal of Primary Prevention*, 33(2-3), 99-110.
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