How to Ask for and Give Much-Needed Help

By Kathryn Cherkas, Program Director

Isn’t it strange that caregivers – those who provide such selfless help to others – are the same people who struggle the most in asking for help? This isn’t because they don’t need support; we certainly know that isn’t true. One of the main reasons caregivers (and most people, really) struggle with asking for help is that they don’t know what to ask for, especially when their plate is so full. It is a cruel catch 22 that the more things you need help with, the harder it is to know what to ask for, and thus things continue to pile up.

The following are some tips and tools to prioritize the things you need help with the most. We’ll guide you through how and who to ask for help, starting with our 24/7 HelpLine (800.272.3900). There is also guidance on how you can support another caregiver you know who might need an extra hand or two.

Your community of care is the group of people (friends, family, neighbors, etc.) that can share in supportive tasks to make day to day life for you easier. In order to best employ your supporters, it is good to outline some of the tasks you need help with the most or those that you may sometimes overlook. Some examples:

1. Packing & mailing packages, buying stamps/ stationery, checking mail, making returns/ exchanges
2. Picking up & dropping off prescription medications
3. Washing the car(s)
4. Raking leaves/tidying yard
5. Cleaning/dusting the house, refrigerator or other equipment
6. Laundry/ironing, vacuuming, or mopping
7. Change light bulbs/replace batteries (especially in a smoke detector)
8. Set-up & remove holiday decorations
9. Walk the dog/pick up pet supplies
10. Create a schedule of birthdays, events and appointments

It can be helpful to categorize the areas in which you need help and then identify the most urgent or important tasks. Look at the chart on the next page and identify categories of support you think would be most helpful for your care partners. Within the categories, identify some specific tasks from the chart or come up with your own. Write the tasks down and have them handy for when someone offers support, you will have concrete requests.

Identifying opportunities for others to support you is a way of realizing your own limitations as a caregiver and as a human. Asking for help is NOT a sign of weakness. Sometimes people want to help but they are worried about how to offer their support without causing mixed messaging. If you have a community of care and need support that has not been offered, speak up, reach out and be honest about what you need. The best time to reach out for help is before you become overburdened with the stress of everything you are juggling, so the earlier the better.

Who you ask to help depends on the type of help you need. Friends, family and close neighbors are the key players in who we usually go to for help. Consider other outside sources: co-workers, church members, hired helpers, etc. In addition to an array of support groups and education programs, the Alzheimer’s Association offers 24/7 care consultations with highly-trained professionals that can direct you to the exact supportive service needed. The Association also has an excellent online community called ALZConnected, serving as a forum for everyone affected by a dementia diagnosis and offering guidance, support and suggestions from those walking the same path.

No matter how you are able to identify areas of support, the Alzheimer’s Association is here to walk you the whole way through. Call us anytime: 800.272.3900

Supporting a Caregiver:

Do you know a caregiver for someone living with dementia and want to help? Follow these handy tips from Alzheimer’s Association and Mayo Clinic Staff:

Be specific: Letting someone know that you are there to help them is lovely, but how many times do people follow up with you? When offering support to a caregiver, present specific action items that you can do for them. For example:

• “I’m spending all of Saturday doing laundry, why don’t you give me some of yours to toss in while I’m at it?”
• “I’m going to the grocery store. What can I pick up for you?”
• “How is your yard looking? How about I come by next week with my mower?”
• “I’m free on Tuesday from 4pm-8pm, can I sit
in for you while you run errands or go get your hair done?”

Bonus if you can provide a specific day/time, which will push the caregiver to accept the help.

**Be present:** When you are helping a caregiver, you are providing a service for their benefit. Try to step into their shoes and spend the time focusing on their ease and comfort so that they may be more inclined to reach out to you and others for support in the future.

**Things to avoid:**
- Don’t bring up your personal stresses and problems: this happens naturally in casual conversation amongst peers but try to avoid it when in the context of helping a caregiver
- Keep your composure: you might see things or behaviors that will surprise you when supporting a caregiver; try to remain cool, calm and collected without judgment
- Stay mindful & present: you might not be helping with the most glamorous of tasks but you are doing a very good deed.

**Be aware:** Many caregivers believe that they can and should do *everything*. This belief can be dangerous to their health and wellbeing, as well as that of whomever is in their care. ‘Caregiver burnout’ is real and your awareness of this in the person you are supporting will allow you to figure out the best course of action. If your offers to help are denied, try to gauge if this is due to the ‘caregiver guilt’ they feel in doing so much and gently, patiently continue to offer help when you can.

**Be specific. Be present. Be aware**

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### What do I Need?

Use this chart as a guide to help you identify your most urgent needs, and how your care team can help you. The specific tasks listed are just examples. Fill in each category with your own tasks, then highlight what is most valuable to you. Once you’ve identified what you need most, you’ll be ready with a specific request the next time someone offers help.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Errands</th>
<th>Emotional Support</th>
<th>Household/Maintenance</th>
<th>Family Routine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pick up/drop off dry cleaning, library books, recycling, etc.</td>
<td>Learn about dementia</td>
<td>Troubleshoot computer problems</td>
<td>Take kids to the park, pool, rec center, or events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take car in for maintenance</td>
<td>Continue to invite to gatherings</td>
<td>Help declutter a garage or closet</td>
<td>Share carpool duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go grocery shopping</td>
<td>Start scheduled calls to talk</td>
<td>Clean, dust, sweep, mop</td>
<td>Provide updates to other family members</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Join a Support Group</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pampering</th>
<th>Logistics</th>
<th>Spiritual Support</th>
<th>Respite</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cut, perm, or dye hair</td>
<td>Help create a phone list or group text</td>
<td>Offer transportation to/from worship</td>
<td>Spend time with the person with dementia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer a mani/pedi</td>
<td>Get their taxes done</td>
<td>Set up a visit from clergy</td>
<td>Take the person with dementia out on a walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide space for the caregiver to take a long bath</td>
<td>Set up transportation to doctor’s appointments</td>
<td>Pray together</td>
<td>Give the caregiver a much needed break</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Find a housecleaner</td>
<td>Read spiritual book aloud</td>
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**The Longest Day**

The Longest Day is the day with the most light — the summer solstice. On June 20, people from across the world will fight the darkness of Alzheimer's through a fundraising activity of their choice. Whether you're participating at home, online or in-person, we have plenty of fun ideas to engage family and friends in The Longest Day.

**Start your team today at alz.org/walk**

**We're walking this year, and we're inviting you to join us.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 25th</td>
<td>West Ventura</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 2nd</td>
<td>Santa Maria</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 23rd</td>
<td>East Ventura</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 30th</td>
<td>San Luis Obispo</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 6th</td>
<td>Santa Barbara</td>
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**Join us for The Longest Day and start your fundraiser now!**

Be a part of the fight to EndALZ at alz.org/tld

Contact Jeff Glover at jkglover@alz.org with questions