

# LEAN ON ME

## THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING A GOOD SUPPORT NETWORK

**You may have heard the saying “a problem shared is a problem halved”. Ted found this true when he was preparing a speech for a friend’s wedding. He was having sleepless nights worrying about getting it just right. He kept his anxieties to himself for several weeks and then decided to confide in his brother, Matt, who had been a best man before.**

Together they came up with a funny and touching speech, which Ted rehearsed several times with Matt before. On the day, the speech was a great success. He knew he couldn’t have done it without Matt’s experience, encouragement, and support.

### **Your personal support network**

As human beings, we are wired to have a network of people we value, respect, love, and trust, particularly at important times in life. Having a good support network can bring a general sense of happiness and satisfaction with life.

When things are difficult, your personal support network is invaluable in helping you cope. When you’re under intense pressure, it can be natural to withdraw from others and focus only on the bad things that are causing you to feel stressed. As individuals, we don’t have all the answers. Having people we can reach out to is vital for solving life’s problems.

### **A good support network can provide you with:**

- **Reassurance.** Emotional support and reassurance when you start doubting yourself can help put your problems into context. Others can cheer you up when you are feeling down.
- **Information.** People in your support network may have personal experience that can help you or point you in the right direction. They may know where you can go to gain support, for example, an independent organization specializing in your problem area.
- **Practical help.** This help could include a variety of practical tasks such as helping to write your resume, babysitting, offering rides, or giving financial support.

- **Problem solving.** Similarly, they may be able to help you think through how to solve the problem. Explaining an issue to someone else can bring a problem into focus so that the solution is more obvious. Alternatively, other people may provide you with a fresh, more positive perspective on your situation.

## **Building your own support network**

When you are under pressure, who would you ask for help? It is useful to think carefully about who to turn to as some people can hinder rather than help, giving unhelpful advice or leading you down the wrong path. You need to be sure that they are willing to help employ good judgment as well as have the time to support you.

Your support network can include people in a professional or social capacity and may include close and extended family, friends, or colleagues. There are also a range of non-profit organizations (e.g. United Way) that may be able to support you if you are facing



a challenging situation and could use some outside help.

Remember that people are generally happy to listen and offer support when you reach out to them, especially if you are seeking help and advice to improve your situation.

## **Being there for others**

You are also part of other people's support network so it is a two-way process. Follow these tips on how to help someone in need<sup>1</sup>:

- Listen to the person's story without interruption
- Be nonjudgmental
- Offer reassurance
- Encourage the individual to focus on what they want to happen
- Ask them to think about the areas over which they have control
- Offer suggestions and advice
- Consider other professional and personal support options

## **How to care for your support network**

As giving and receiving support is so important to our well-being, we need to nurture and maintain the support we give and receive. Remember to:

- Develop and value your support network
- Invest time in talking and building relationships with others

Don't forget to have fun times within your support network too!

1. Connect with others. Mental Health America website, <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/connect-others>. Accessed 11 April 2018.