

Personal Safety Nets® e-Newsletter



Joining a Community

September 2010, Issue 32

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Letters . . . We Get Letters

(and we love you for them!)

Dear Safety Nets Team,

Two years ago, I got to participate in someone's safety net. A woman who shared a good friend in common with me sent out an email saying she needed support because she was going in for a stem cell transplant for Irritable Bowel Syndrome. She and I were chatting after I received her email. She was distressed that none of her friends contacted her to offer help. **I was reminded of the time after my husband died when friends would say, "call me if you need anything." With the rug pulled out from under my world, I couldn't think of a thing to ask for. I was just too numb.**



As Mary and I chatted, I realized she was in a similar situation. She'd been fighting this disease for a decade and didn't have any additional energy to gather her friends.

I believed her friends wanted to help but just plain didn't know what to do. So, they were stuck in the doing nothing place. **Since I'm the "jump into the deep**

Join the Community Or Stiff-Arm?

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?**

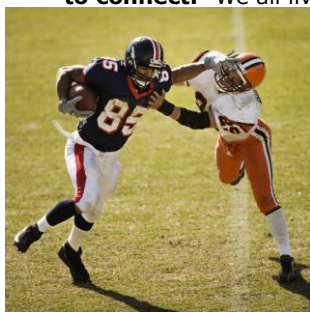
No matter what kind of help you need, a **Personal Safety Nets® solution focuses on the concept of building a community of friends, family, experts, novices, organization members, permanent members and part-timers from which a care-share team can be called to assist when you need it, with different folks 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.

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,**

end of the pool" girl, I said, "let me help you." I asked for her email list and sent out an email to her friends telling them how we were all going to be there for Mary; that I'd divided up the list into weekly groups and we were going to be assigned tasks by the week.



I promised to keep everyone posted with a weekly report on Mary's treatment and progress. **Everyone wrote back saying they wanted to be involved and were looking forward to their**

"assignments." The planned six week treatment turned into a horror-filled four months. Everyone stayed. Everyone helped. And, when Mary had crisis days, her friends answered the call. Several times, I'd send out a "stat" email asking for cards to arrive on the following Monday. Dozens of cards would arrive at MD Anderson for Mary as she was going in to get her results.

I am so grateful for the opportunity and experience. In many ways, Mary didn't (doesn't) remember her stay in the hospital but weeks after she got home, she opened boxes of mail from people who love her. A tangible reminder of the love of her friends.

It's important to know that ordinary people can do these things and I'm as ordinary as can be. I didn't know Mary all that well. Surprisingly, this let me enter in with a bit of distance, and to be even more effective."

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. In a follow up e-Newsletter we'll help with those in need of assistance "asking" for help and review a similar list to get you started.

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!**



A Funny, News & Notes

A FUNNY: In our July/August [e-Newsletter](#) we shared a funny story and received wonderful feedback, so we thought we'd try it again compliment of our friend, Trudy.

God had been missing for six days. Eventually, Michael, the archangel, found him resting on the seventh day. He inquired, "Where have you been?"

God smiled deeply and proudly pointed downwards through the clouds, "Look, Michael. Look what I've made." Archangel Michael looked puzzled, and said, "What is it?"

"It's a planet," replied God, "and I've put life on it. I'm going to call it Earth and it's going to be a place to test Balance." "Balance?" inquired Michael, "I'm still confused."

God explained, pointing to different parts of earth. "For example, northern Europe will be a place of great opportunity and wealth, while southern Europe is going to be poor. Over here I've placed a continent of white people, and over there is a continent of black people. Balance in all things."

God continued pointing to different countries. "This one will be extremely hot, while this one will be very cold and covered in ice."

The Archangel, impressed by God's work, then pointed to a land area and said, "What's that one?"

"That's Washington State, the most glorious place on earth. There are beautiful mountains, rivers and streams, ocean, lakes, forests, hills, and plains. The people from Washington State are going to be handsome, modest, intelligent, and humorous, and they are going to travel the world. They will be extremely sociable, hardworking, high achieving, carriers of peace, and producers of software."

Michael gasped in wonder and admiration, but then asked, "But what about balance, God? You said there would be balance."

God smiled, "There's another Washington. Wait till you see the idiots I put there!!!"

BLOG AND TEST: How Resilient Are You? It's a topic we've discussed many times in our monthly e-Newsletters. **Now, thanks to our friends at [YES!](#)**





Reading about the work you do, I'm reminded of the loveliness and joy of friends and the importance of not only asking for help but giving it. It's a profound experience.

Thank you for your work ~

Best ~ Heidi Behrens-Benedict

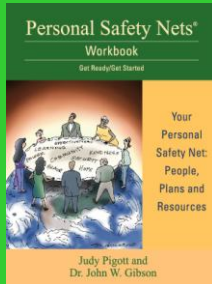
Magazine, you can take this [test](#) to find out how you rate. It's a fun and instant test, along with some ways you can improve your score - **which includes the idea of building a support network via Personal Safety Nets®.**

REMEMBER - WE'RE ON FACEBOOK: While we continue to invite you to follow our ideas, articles, stories and experiences on our blog - now we offer you the opportunity to be our "friend" by joining us on [Facebook](#). **We also promise to post more often and many of our newest worksheets and**

BLOG AND WIN: Keep an eye focused on our [BLOG](#) page at Personal Safety Nets®. **Beginning in October, we'll be offering weekly free tickets to plays at West Seattle's [ArtsWest](#)** - which produces artistic events so fiercely compelling that they require conversation, improve the imagination, and promote cultural vibrancy as a core value for the communities of Seattle. We'll be providing lots of chances for everyone to see a play during the 2010-2011 season.



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