

How to Ask for Help at Work

You've probably heard it millions of times: "*Just ask for help.*" But how do you do that when you don't know what help you need or when you don't know what to say or how to say it?

You are not alone. Asking for help takes courage and practice. Once you get into the habit, your work productivity as well as your emotional health can improve.

Asking for help at work can be daunting and unfamiliar for some people. People resist asking for help mainly due to fear of rejection or being seen as incompetent. Asking for help requires a good level of self-esteem, belief that you are worthy of help, and trust that help will come to you should you ask for it.

You may have critical beliefs that asking for help is a sign of weakness or that you should not have to ask. You may not even be aware that you speak to yourself in this way or that you talk yourself out of reaching out for support in the work environment.

Feelings you might experience include:

- Embarrassment—feeling awkward asking for help
- Frustration—angry that you need help
- Sadness—feeling unable to ask for help
- Shame—feeling unworthy of help
- Guilt—feeling like asking for help burdens others
- Apprehension—fear of asking for help
- Numbness—feeling like nothing will help anyway

Disadvantages of not asking for help:

- becoming overwhelmed and experiencing burnout from the workload or responsibilities
- diminished self-esteem due to the belief that you have to do it all yourself
- isolation and lack of connection to co-workers
- frustration with yourself and others
- internal suffering and conflicting emotions
- lack of trust between you and co-workers

Benefits of asking for help:

- fosters a connection to others
- builds resilience
- increases productivity
- encourages others to ask for help too
- increases gratitude
- brings clarity to communication
- demonstrates maturity

What to consider when asking for help

Clarity. Be honest with yourself about what support you need. Keep track of what you may need help with—whether it's a question about a project or how to ask for a pay raise: jotting down your questions and concerns may be helpful in preparing to ask for help.

Humility. Humility is not the same as humiliation. Humility means you believe you are no better or worse than anyone. Being humble can help remind you that everyone goes through challenges—not just you.

Communication. Be clear and precise with the help you need and keep clarifying how you are feeling. Remember, do not assume members of your team know what you want or need, as assumptions can lead to misunderstandings and mistakes.

Trust. Have faith in yourself and others that you can ask for what you need and that someone will be willing and able to help and support you. Trust that you deserve to be supported.

Practise. It takes time and effort to get comfortable with asking your manager and co-workers for help. You can begin practising by asking for help once a week; start by asking to be shown a new skill or ask a question if one comes up in a work meeting. If you feel like your workload is getting to be too much or you need to take a step back, start by saying something like, “When you have a minute today, I could really use your help with something.”

Patience. Take time for yourself and others. You and your team have busy schedules, and you may not get a response right away, so give time and space for co-workers or your manager to respond to you. If someone is unavailable when you ask for help, avoid taking it personally. Consider whether another team member or your manager might have the capacity.

Other ways of communicating when not in person

If you don't feel able to have a face-to-face conversation yet, or if you work remotely, you can still ask for help in a number of ways. Emails, for example, give you time to reflect on what you want to say and organize your words. Video calls have also become a popular workplace communication method, and of course, picking up the phone is still an option—especially if your need is urgent.

Remember, asking for help takes practice and time, but the rewards for being able to reach out to your team and manager will benefit everyone as you set a standard for open and honest communication.

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