

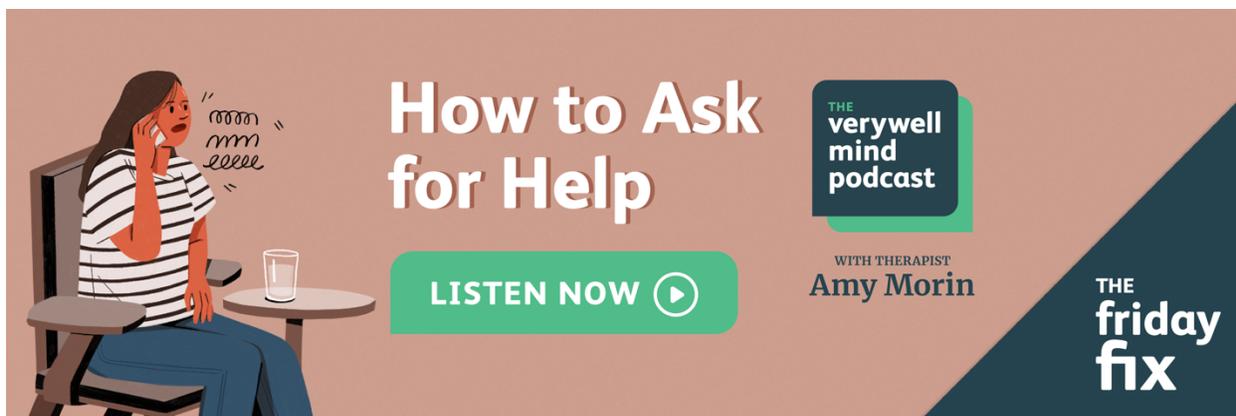


THE  
**verywell  
mind  
podcast**

WITH THERAPIST  
**Amy Morin**

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## 219 — Friday Fix: How to Ask for Help

Welcome to *The Verywell Mind Podcast*! I'm Amy Morin, editor-in-chief of Verywell Mind. I'm also a psychotherapist and a best-selling author of four books on mental strength.

You're listening to The Friday Fix! Every Friday, I share a quick mental strength strategy that can help fix the thoughts, feelings, and actions that can hold you back in life.

And the fun part is we record the show from a sailboat in the Florida Keys!

Don't forget to subscribe to us on your favorite platform so you can get mental strength tips delivered to you every single week.

Now let's dive into today's episode!

It's really hard to ask for help sometimes. This is true whether you need professional help for depression or you need a ride to the airport.

I did a quick Instagram survey and 85% of you said you had trouble asking for help. So if you struggle with this, know that you're not alone.

But we aren't meant to survive all alone. We get along in life much better when we ask other people for help—and when we help them with things too. We accomplish a lot

more when we cooperate. But productivity isn't the only reason why we should ask for help.

Other people often have wisdom, skills, and resources that can benefit us. And there's for the taking if we just ask for help.

Life gets easier when we tell people what we need and we're open to helping when they tell us what they need.

I can't tell you how many of my therapy clients tell me how difficult it was for them to make the initial phone call to come into the office. They were scared to admit they needed help and terrified to make the initial phone call and then scared to come to the first appointment. But once they did, they realized it wasn't so bad.

Often our treatment goals involve asking other people for help too. A lot of unnecessary stress stems from people trying to do everything on their own. Asking another parent for help picking your kids up from soccer practice or asking a family member for help picking out a new laptop could save you a lot of time and trouble.

It's obviously easier said than done. I think it's easy sometimes to ask for help with something concrete – like asking a friend to help make the food for an event. But harder to ask for something less tangible—like emotional support.

The reason it's so hard tends to boil down to fear:

- **Fear the person will say no.** More often than not, people are more eager to help than we give them credit for. Someone might say no to helping you. But it's usually not as painful to tolerate as you might expect.
- **Fear they will say yes even though they really don't want to.** But if someone really doesn't want to do something — it's their job to say no. And if they commit and then are upset about it, that's their fault, not your's.

- **Fear they will think you're weak.** We all have this fear sometimes that we'll be judged for asking for help. But when you ask someone for help, they're more likely to see you as relatable. People don't like you because you're completely independent all the time. They relate to your struggles. It actually takes a lot of mental strength to ask for help. It's much easier to pretend you can do everything on your own than it is to acknowledge you could use a helping hand.
- **Fear you will owe them a favor.** No one likes a transactional relationship. And only you know if your relationship is really about keeping score or whether your brain just tells you this. A healthy relationship should involve helping one another but it shouldn't involve keeping score to ensure everything is "even." But sometimes the relationship isn't actually like that—we just put pressure on ourselves. We think if a friend helps us, we must make it up to them as soon as possible. And much of the time, the other person isn't expecting us to do that.

Most of the time those fears are unfounded.

People aren't upset by our requests and they don't tend to get as annoyed as we think they will.

And I'll let you in on a little secret. Asking someone for a favor might actually make them like you more.

It's been dubbed the Benjamin Franklin effect since it's a strategy he apparently used to use. But there's research studies that show he was likely right.

When someone is kind to you, they will like you more. So if you ask for a favor and they do it, their brain recognizes that they are kind to you—and kind behavior increases how much that person likes you.

Of course, constantly asking for favors or complaining about people's efforts to help isn't going to help you gain any friends. But, asking for a little help sometimes, will actually increase how much the helper likes you.

Here are four things you can do when it's tough to ask for help:

### **1. Acknowledge what makes it hard to ask for help.**

When you're thinking about whether to ask for help, acknowledge what's making you hesitate. You don't necessarily have to tell anyone why it's hard but acknowledge it to yourself.

Once you're able to recognize what your fear is, you can make a healthier, more rational decision. You might decide to face your fear by asking for help even though it feels uncomfortable.

### **2. Say what you need.**

You might be tempted to hint around that you could use a little help, rather than outright ask. That's because you won't feel quite the same sting of rejection if someone doesn't pick up on your hint as compared to if someone outright says no.

But people aren't likely to pick up on your hint which might leave you feeling frustrated, and make you less likely to ask for help in the future. There's research that shows people with low self-esteem are most likely to do this.

A 2018 study published in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* found that people with low self-esteem often seek indirect support — like sulking or complaining. Rather than ask for help — they show people that they feel sad or that they're having a hard time in hopes that they'll offer support.

Ironically, those strategies tend to backfire and are more likely to prompt a negative reaction from people. That furthers their belief that no one wants to help them or that they aren't good enough.

Other people aren't mind readers. And if you don't say what you need, they won't know how to help.

So rather than complaining about how much you have to do, ask someone if they can assist you with a task. Or instead of sulking about the fact that no one has invited you to do anything, speak up and ask if you can join in.

If you're not used to asking for help directly, try it as an experiment and see what happens. You might find that even if someone says no, dealing with the rejection isn't as bad as you fear.

### **3. Ask a "yes or no" question.**

So often people say something like, "If you're available on Saturday afternoon, I could use the help." Then, when the other person says, "OK," you're not sure if they've just agreed to help or if they agreed to help only if they're not busy.

This confusion can lead to misunderstanding, hurt feelings, and unnecessary frustration.

So be clear by asking a yes or no question.

Ask, "Can you help me move the couch out of my living room on Saturday at 2:00?" You can also add, "I don't need to know right now if you aren't sure. But if you could let me know by tomorrow afternoon, that would be really helpful."

When you make your request clear, other people are more likely to be clear with their response.

#### **4. Accept the response.**

Whatever response you get from someone, accept it. If they say no, just say OK and move on.

The same goes for if they say yes because sometimes when people say yes, we say things like, “Are you sure?” Or “But only if you want to.” It’s almost like we start trying to talk them out of it as soon as they agree.

Just be gracious and say thank you. Show appreciation for their willingness to help. Trust that if they really don’t want to do something, they’ll say no and it’s their job to make that decision for themselves. If they accept, there’s no need to feel bad or second guess yourself for asking them.

So practice asking for help with small things. It makes it much easier to ask for help for more difficult things when you need it.

If there’s someone you’re grateful for, share this show with them! Simply sharing a link to this episode could help someone feel better and grow stronger.

Do you want free access to my online course? It’s called “10 Mental Strength Exercises That Will Help You Reach Your Greatest Potential.” To get your free pass, all you have to do is leave us a review on Apple Podcasts or Spotify. Then, send us a screenshot of your review. Our email address is [podcast@verywell.com](mailto:podcast@verywell.com). We’ll reply with your all-access pass to the course.

Thank you for hanging out with me today and listening to *The Verywell Mind Podcast!* And as always, a big thank you to my show’s producer (who helps me with everything from creating the podcast to picking out movies), Nick Valentin.