





Building a Support Network: Who's on Your Side?

Activity 18-1	What's New?	 10-15 minutes
Activity 18-2	Getting Support	 15 minutes
Activity 18-3	Who's in Your Support Network?	 20-25 minutes
Activity 18-4	Negotiating for Support	 30-35 minutes
Activity 18-5	Feedback/Wrap-up	 15 minutes

Key Concepts

- Emotional support, financial assistance, information, and goods and services are all ways in which people help each other. Those to whom a person turns regularly for help make up that person's *support network*.
- Asking for (and getting) help from people when it is needed is one way of managing life's difficult situations.
- It is healthy and acceptable for men to ask for help when they need it.
- Being willing to help other people — and being able to understand *their* needs — generally makes those people more willing to offer support when it is needed.
- In many situations it is appropriate for individuals to get support from people they don't know personally, including organizations and agencies that offer various services.

Building an effective support network can be difficult, but it is well worth the effort.

Materials Checklist

Activity 18-2 Getting Support

- A long piece of rope
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Activity 18-3 Who's in Your Support Network?

- Handout, "Creating a Support Network"
 - Pencils (for everyone)
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Activity 18-4 Negotiating for Support

- Handout, "Asking for Support: Case Studies"
- Newsprint
- Marker

What's New?

Tailor the following questions so that you're asking the fathers about specific concepts, ideas, and skills that they reviewed in Session 17, "Managing Your Time and Money."

▼ Discussion Questions

1. Could someone please volunteer to summarize what we discussed in the last session?
2. Let's review some of your plans for managing your time and money. Who would like to describe his plan?
3. Which of the ideas about managing time and money that we discussed in the last session were most helpful? Which were least helpful? Why?
4. Did you rethink any of the ideas we discussed about how to take care of your own needs while responsibly supporting your children? What ideas do you have about how to spend sufficient time with your children?
5. Overall, how helpful was the last session? Why?

Getting Support

Purpose: To help participants identify their sources of support and acknowledge the importance of a support network.

Materials: A long piece of rope.

Time: 15 minutes.

Procedure: Introduce this session by saying something like, “Throughout your life, many people have provided support to you in different ways. Today we want to talk about those people, how they helped you, and how you can strengthen the supportive relationships in your life.”

Have the men move their chairs into a tight circle. You, the leader, should also be in the circle and should begin by picking up the rope as you tell about a time in your life when you needed support or help (as a parent, if possible) and someone gave it to you. As you finish your anecdote, tie a knot in the rope, and pass it to a participant, explaining that now he should tell about a time when he received support from someone (again, as a parent, if possible). After he has shared his example, tell him to tie a knot in the rope and then pass it to another participant. The fathers should continue to tie knots and pass the rope around the circle, until everyone has had at least one opportunity to tell about a time when he needed and got support.

After everyone has responded, explain that the knots in the rope symbolize the strength of a *support network*: a group of people who are connected to one another by caring relationships. A support network helps its members through good and bad times. All parents need a support network to reduce the stress in their lives.

To discuss this activity, ask the following questions.

▼ Discussion Questions

1. How easy is it for you to ask for help? Do you usually ask for help directly, or do you hint around that you need help?
2. How often do you get support from people without having to ask? (Discuss examples.)
3. What keeps you from asking someone for help? (Are you shy? Embarrassed? Too proud?)
4. What kind of support do you need from people in order to be a successful father? (Solicit examples involving their children's mother, parents, and relatives as well as friends, counselors, and employers.)
5. In Session 16, "Taking Care of Business," we did an activity called "The Mirror" (Activity 16-2). Some of you had cracks in your mirror images of yourselves. Do you think that asking for support from family and friends could help you to "fix" these cracks? Why, or why not?
6. We've talked about situations in which someone gave you support. Has anyone ever come to *you* to get support? (Discuss examples.) How did it feel to help someone else out?
7. Can you think of any situations in which it is a bad idea to ask for support? (Examples: when asking for support means not taking responsibility for yourself; when support allows you to "give up" without trying.)

Who's in Your Support Network?

Purpose: To help participants identify the people and agencies in their support networks. To describe the characteristics of supportive relationships.

Materials: Handout, "Creating a Support System"; pencils (for everyone).

Time: 20-25 minutes.

Procedure: Explain that the next activity will help the men identify which people and agencies make up their support network. Introduce and define this concept by asking, "Which people and agencies help you and your children by listening, caring, and giving their time and sometimes financial assistance?"

Ask the participants to complete the handout "Creating a Support System." Read and explain the headings on the handout, and give the men the following instructions:

1. On the first page, list all the people with whom you have regular contact. Include family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, counselors, people in your community, etc.
2. Go over your list, and put a *check mark* next to everyone who is supportive *in general*. (Is this person trustworthy? Can you ask this person to do a favor? Can you talk over your problems with this person?)
3. *Circle* the names of those people who make you feel most comfortable and who know a lot about you and would help you out.
4. *Cross out* the names of people who are *not* supportive of you (those who put you down or are critical of you).
5. Put a *question mark* next to the names of people whose support is uncertain or unknown. When you have finished, some people will have more than one mark next to their names.

Now ask the fathers to consider only the names that are not crossed out. Next to each name, ask them to list a quality which makes that person seem like a supporter. (Examples: is a good listener; is there when I need help; is nonjudgmental; makes me laugh; will offer financial help; gives me his or her time.)

Next, go through the rest of the handout with the fathers, asking them to identify which people they would turn to in the various situations described. After completing the handout, tell the fathers to hang on to this list, so that they can remember all the people who are part of their support network.

Discuss the activity by asking the following questions.

▼ Discussion Questions

1. What are your reactions to this activity? (For example, were you surprised? Disappointed? Pleased with the people you identified as part of your support network?)
2. Which of these is harder for you?
 - Asking for emotional support (someone to listen, give advice, etc.)
 - Asking for specific help (such as money, babysitting, a ride, etc.)
3. Who are the key people in your support network? (Which names did you circle or check off?)
4. How would you describe your relationships with these people? How much give-and-take is there in these relationships? (Do you both help each other, or does one of you usually do the helping?)
5. In general, how do these people respond when you ask for help or support?
6. If you get support, does that make you dependent on others? Or can it be seen as “taking care of business”?
7. If you had a magic wand, how would you change the relationships in your support network? How would you improve them? What role do you play if these relationships don’t always work? (For example, do you sometimes take advantage of your supporters? Do you at times fail to fulfill your responsibilities? Is support a “one-way street”?)

8. Which agencies (clinics, schools, social service programs) have given you help?
How do you feel about getting help from these agencies?
9. What do you do when people turn down your request for help?
10. Which of the qualities you listed for your supporters could be used to describe you?
11. How reliable are you? What changes in your behavior would make you more reliable? (For example, do you show up when you are expected somewhere? Do you fail to keep promises?)
12. What would your children say about how much they can rely on you for support?

Creating a Support Network



People in My Support Network

Name	Quality
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____
4. _____	_____
5. _____	_____
6. _____	_____
7. _____	_____
8. _____	_____
9. _____	_____
10. _____	_____

Problems and Solutions

If I were sick, I could call _____

If my child were sick, I would call: _____

If I needed money, I would call: _____

If my child were doing poorly in school, I would call: _____

If I had a bad fight with my partner or boss, I would call: _____

If I lost my job, I would call: _____

If I wanted company, I would call: _____

If I wanted to talk, I would call: _____

HANDOUT

Session	18
Activity	3

If I needed a place to stay, I would call: _____

If I had good news, I would call: _____

If I needed a job, I would call: _____

Fill in the blanks.

If I needed _____, I would call: _____

If I needed _____, I would call: _____

If I needed _____, I would call: _____

Complete the following statements.

I'm going to ask _____ to _____
_____ for me.

If I get the help I ask for, _____
_____.

If my request is turned down, _____
_____.

Negotiating for Support

Purpose: To increase participants' understanding of the attitudes and feelings of people who are in their support network. To identify effective ways to ask for help.

Materials: Handout, "Asking for Support: Case Studies"; newsprint and marker.

Time: 30-35 minutes.

Planning Note: Option 1 of this activity uses cases studies and role plays to help the men understand the viewpoints of people in their support network. If the men are reluctant to see the other person's side in their relationships and often have trouble seeing their role in conflicts, choose option 1. On the other hand, if the biggest problem seems to be the men's inability to ask for help — and if they can describe situations in which they tried (or wanted to try) to get help but did not know how — choose option 2. (If time permits, you can also combine both options by first doing the role plays and then having the men practice asking for help in the real-life situations that they have described.)

If time is limited or participants prefer to work in a large group, keep everyone together, and discuss some of the case studies and real-life situations. Ask the men how they view each situation and what they think the father should do. Try to focus attention on the other person's point of view in the situation.

As the actors are role-playing the situations, ask questions that help focus the role play and move it along.

Optional Procedure: Introduce this activity by saying something like, “We’ve spent time identifying the people who are in your support networks. Relationships with some of these people may be strained, and we may not always feel that they are willing to help as much as they could. Even our supporters may complain about us and feel that we don’t always do our part in the relationship.” Ask whether anyone has ever experienced such a conflict, and take approximately five minutes to discuss these situations. Then say, “This activity will give you a chance to look at situations from both points of view — that of the father who needs help and that of the person who might provide it.”

Tell participants that they will be role-playing in this activity and that they should have to give themselves over completely to the characters they are playing. They will work in small groups to plan the role plays and then will perform them for the whole group.

Divide participants into small groups, and distribute the handout “Asking for Support: Case Studies.” Then assign a situation to each group, and allow approximately 10 minutes to plan the role play. Each group should select actors to play the roles, and the other members can offer suggestions for lines and help the actors rehearse. The actors should express the feelings of the characters they are playing.

After 10 minutes, reconvene the large group. Ask the small groups to perform their role plays and to begin by reading the case study aloud.

After each role play, discuss the following questions, asking the actors to respond first.

▼ Discussion Questions

1. How did each of the characters feel during the role play?
2. How well did the characters listen to each other?
3. Did the support-giver make it easy or hard to ask for help? Why?
4. What other things could the father have said to convince the support-giver to help him out?
5. What could the father do or say to be more understanding of the support-giver's feelings?
6. For those of you who played the role of the father, if you put yourself in the other person's shoes, would you give the father what he wanted? Why, or why not?
7. Do these situations happen in real life? Are your real-life situations with friends and family like these case studies or different?
8. When you get into situations like these, how do things usually go? What goes well? What doesn't?

Asking for Support: Case Studies

SITUATION 1: BETTY AND BRIAN

Betty: You are 36 years old. Over the past year, you have been caring for your son Brian's two-year-old daughter, Shamika. You really wish Brian would not depend on you so much. So much of your money goes to him and Shamika that you haven't bought yourself a new dress in over six months. However, Brian is your only child, and you love being a grandmother. Your friend Dora thinks that you are ruining Brian and are helping to make him irresponsible. You agree with her, but you can't imagine what Brian and Shamika would do without you. The thought of someone else taking care of Shamika really concerns you.

Brian: You are 21 and have recently obtained your GED. You and your daughter Shamika are living with your mother. Shamika's mother, Angie, has been in a drug treatment program for the past year, which has really put all the child care duties on your shoulders. You'd like to find a program and learn a trade, but you want to take your time and find the right school. Your mother provides for both you and Shamika, so you don't feel any pressure to do anything quickly. Just last week, your mother brought Shamika over \$200 worth of new clothes. You think your mother is great, and you feel very close to her. The two of you talk a lot, and in some ways you feel that your mother is taking better care of Shamika than you and Angie ever could.

Create a role play in which you ask your mother for \$500 to buy a used car.

SITUATION 2: ALEX AND CARL

Alex: You are a 50-year-old bus driver. Your 17-year-old son, Carl, has recently become a father. You have always told Carl that you wanted him to make something out of his life and maybe to become a professional. Carl has disappointed you, but you still feel the need to support him. However, you have decided that you won't do certain things for him. For example, you have agreed to let him live with you rent-

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free, but you refuse to give him money. Your wife, Yvonne, tells you that you shouldn't be so hard on Carl. She reminds you of the days when you and she were young parents. You understand her concerns, but you also believe that a man has a responsibility to provide for himself and his family.

Carl: You're a 17-year-old father. You didn't want to have a baby, and you thought that your girlfriend, Tonya, was taking birth control pills. You pay Tonya a small amount every month for child support. It's not a lot, but it's all you can afford right now, because you're in a job training program and can only work part time. Your father is upset by the situation and has not been speaking to you lately. Today, Tonya called you in a panic because the baby has strep throat. She asked if you could pay for the prescription because she hasn't been able to get a Medicaid card yet. You decide to ask your father for help, even though he has made it clear that he won't give you any money.

Create a role play in which you explain to your father that you need his support in this special situation.

SITUATION 3: TERRANCE AND KENNY

Terrance: You are a 23-year-old father who is currently employed at a small computer firm. It's a good job that pays pretty well. Things have been tough for you over the past year or so. Your girlfriend had a baby, and you are spending more and more time hanging out and drinking. At first, the drinking made everything easier. Now, you're facing a lot of problems. Your girlfriend is so disgusted with you that she won't even let you see the baby.

Your boss has noticed that you're drinking on the job and she has referred you to the Employee Assistance Program. You're really scared that you might lose your job. You're also really scared that you might have a serious drinking problem. Both of your parents drink too much. This is something that you and your older cousin Kenny used to talk about a lot. He was a big support to you when you were kids. You decide to talk things over with Kenny because he is family and will keep your business to himself.

Kenny: You are 27, married, and have a five-year-old son. You are very family-oriented and have accomplished more than any of the other children in your family.

Everyone looks up to you. People seem to be drawn to you. Many people come to you with their problems because you are so open and don't judge them. Recently your aunt called you to tell you that your cousin Terrance was having a lot of problems. Today he calls you and asks whether he can come by and talk with you.

Create a role play in which the two men talk about Terrance's drinking.

SITUATION 4: RONALD AND MR. GOMEZ

Ronald: You are 32 years old and have three children. You don't live with your children's mother, Annie, but you try to visit once or twice a week. Lately, whenever you visit, you've noticed that Annie is usually sleeping. The place is a mess, the kids are always raggy-looking, and there is hardly any food in the house. Whenever you try to talk with Annie, she just shrugs you off and tells you that she's tired. You begin to wonder if maybe she's doing drugs or something, but you're afraid to ask. Just last week you started going to a program for fathers, and that social worker, Mr. Gomez, seemed pretty cool. Even though you don't trust social workers very much, you decide to ask him for some advice about Annie and the kids.

Mr. Gomez: You are the social worker who is responsible for providing counseling services for the fathers in your group. So far, very few men have come to see you, because the program is fairly new. You've been working hard at getting to know the guys in the program, because you really want to see this program work. But you know that the men are still testing you to see how you handle things.

Create a role play in which Ronald asks Mr. Gomez what he should do about Annie and his kids.

SITUATION 5: STEVE AND MR. WHEELER

Steve: You are 29 years old and the father of two boys, three-year-old Steven and 10-month-old Christopher. You've been working from 4 P.M. to midnight at the Post Office for the past four years. You've always been a good worker, and you get along OK with your boss, Mr. Wheeler. The only problem with him is that he hates it when anyone asks him to change the schedule, since it affects everything else on his shift. Recently, however, you started to think about going back to school. You are tired of

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sorting mail, and you are sick of the evening shift. You never get to spend time with your kids, and you have no social life. You found out about an electricians' training program that you would like to get into, but it meets in the evening, and you can't afford to quit your job.

Mr. Wheeler: As a supervisor at the Post Office for 19 years, you've seen a lot of people come and go. Some of them were good workers, but others made your job really difficult because they didn't seem to care about their work. Among your current employees, you like Steve, because he's always reliable. You would hate to see him go.

Create a role play in which Steve asks Mr. Wheeler to change his schedule.

SITUATION 6: ANTHONY AND FELICIA

Anthony: You are a 36-year-old father with four children. You are about to be released from prison after doing time for drug charges. While you were in prison, you got your GED and completed an office machine repair course. You also attended AA meetings almost every day. For the first time in your life, you feel as though you can make something of yourself, if only someone will give you a chance. The first orders of business are to find a place to live and to get a job. Then you can start visiting your kids again. You plan to talk with your sister Felicia, who has always been there for you whenever you had a problem.

Felicia: You are 34 years old; you have three children, and you live in a two-bedroom housing project. You've been struggling to make ends meet for your kids on the salary you earn in the toy factory, where you have worked for seven years. Life has been hard, but you believe that the Lord will be good to you if you are good to others. Often, however, you feel that people — especially men — take advantage of your kindness. You have three brothers, but none of them has called you in over a year.

Create a role play in which Anthony asks Felicia whether he can stay with her until he gets his feet on the ground.

SITUATION 7: JOHNNY AND NANCY

Johnny: You are a 29-year-old father of two children from different relationships. You are still married to the mother of your first child, although you haven't seen your wife or your four-year-old son in two years. You see your second child, Christine, every week, and you are still involved with her mother, Nancy. You pay her about \$100 a month for child support. You haven't sent any money to your wife and son, because you just haven't had any since Christine was born. Your wife calls and asks you to send money to help pay for an operation that your son needs.

Nancy: You are a 23-year-old single mother with a two-year-old daughter, Christine. You don't work right now, but you do receive state support, and Christine's father gives you \$100 a month to cover the part of the rent that welfare won't pay. You know that Johnny doesn't make much money, but he wants you to live in a nice place, and it's the least he can do for his daughter.

Create a role play in which Johnny asks Nancy whether he can skip this month's child support so that he can send money to his son.

SITUATION 8: STANLEY AND MRS. JONES

Stanley: You are a 22-year-old father who has been enrolled in a GED program for the last two years. You expect to pass your test this month, and you plan to go to college in the fall. Your child's mother, Michelle, is 18 years old and is pregnant again. When Michelle told her mother that she was pregnant, her mother told her that she would have to leave. The social worker has found Michelle a shelter for pregnant women, but no children are allowed to stay there. Although you have been with Michelle for three years, your mom doesn't like her, and she has also been very reluctant to spend time with her grandchild.

Mrs. Jones: You are a 56-year-old woman who has raised four sons. Although the first three were always in trouble with drugs and the law, your youngest son, Stanley, has been your pride and joy and may even go to college. But you don't like his girlfriend, Michelle, because you feel that she brings him down.

Create a role play in which Stanley asks his mother whether he can bring his daughter, Stephanie, to live with them for a while.

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SITUATION 9: PEDRO AND MARIE

Pedro: You are a 26-year-old father who has been working as a messenger for the past three years. You hate your job, but you didn't have the skills to do anything else. Out of the \$150 you bring home each week, you give your daughter's mother \$50. You recently heard of a job training program in electrical work and carpentry that also offers GED classes. You've always been good with your hands, and you think this program would be great for you. Since the cutoff age for this program is 26, you have to enroll now, or you can forget it.

Marie: You are a 24-year-old mother who has been working full time as a secretary since your daughter was three months old. You bring home \$180 a week, which barely covers your own expenses. Without the \$50 a week that you get from Pedro, you'd never make it. You use this money to pay your mother to watch your daughter.

Create a role play in which Pedro asks Marie whether he can stop giving her money for a while so that he can attend the job training program.

Optional Procedure: Instead of using the case studies on the handout, ask the fathers to brainstorm a list of situations in which they ask someone for support or assistance. (The list of needs could include money, a job, a place to stay, something to eat, a ride, something they want to borrow, babysitting for their child, etc.) Post the list on newsprint, and ask for two volunteers for each situation: an asker and a person being asked. (Or, if you prefer, pair off the men, and have them take turns being the asker.) The man who is the asker should spend about two minutes telling his partner what he needs. The rest of the group should observe the interaction, listening carefully to *how* the asker seeks help and *how* the support-giver responds. When the two minutes are up, have the group critique the scene, focusing on how effective the asker was in making his request and, if necessary, suggesting better ways to ask for help. Continue this until everyone has had a chance to ask for something. Then discuss the following questions.

▼ Discussion Questions

1. How did it feel to have to ask for something?
2. What got in the way when you tried to ask for help?
3. How did the supporter, or giver, respond to you?
4. How does it feel when you ask for something and the person turns you down?
5. How did it feel to be the giver?
6. What's it like when someone asks you for something that you don't want to give?
7. When you played the role of the asker, suppose that you were the other person instead. Would you have given what you asked for? Why or why not?
8. When you get into situations like these, how do things usually go? What goes well? What doesn't?

Feedback/Wrap-up

Ask questions to discuss today's session.

▼ Discussion Questions

1. In general, what did you learn today about the people you rely on for help and support? How does the need for support fit into your plans to become self-sufficient?
2. Was it hard for any of you to think of people who are part of your support network? If so, what was hard about it? If you couldn't think of any supporters, what can you do to build supportive relationships?
3. Has any of you needed something in the past (do you need something now) that you would like to share with the group?
4. How did it feel to practice asking for help in this session?
5. As a member of this peer support group, what have you learned about asking for support or help from others? What have you learned about giving your help or support to others?
6. Do you think that you will be able to ask someone for help in the future? If not, why not?