

Ep #5: Need Help As a Parent? Here's How to Get It



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Devon Clement

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Today on the podcast, we're going to be talking about one of my favorite topics, how to ask for, accept, and truly get the help you need as a parent. Whether that's with childcare, chores, cooking, laundry, or whatever, you don't have to do this alone. I'm going to teach you how.

Welcome to *Parenthood Prep*, the only show that helps sleep-deprived parents and overwhelmed parents-to-be to successfully navigate those all-important early years with their baby, toddler, and child. If you are ready to provide the best care for your newborn, manage those toddler tantrums, and grow with your child, you're in the right place. Now here's your host, and baby and parenting expert, Devon Clement.

Hello, and welcome back to *Parenthood Prep*. This is now our second episode since the launch, where we launched three original episodes, and it has been going so well. People have been reading, reviewing, sending me messages, and just really loving it. It's so awesome. I feel so great that I've been able to share this information and really help people.

I'm so glad and thank you so much for listening. Thank you so much for reviewing. I would absolutely love it if you would continue sharing, spreading the word, sending it to your friends who have kids or are expecting or might be expecting, that would be really fantastic. Thank you so much.

Today, I want to talk about a topic that is so super important and so near and dear to my heart. When you have a baby, or you have a kid or whatever, the importance of asking for and accepting help, not trying to do it all yourself. Culturally, as a society, especially in America, especially these days, there's this attitude that we have to do everything ourselves. We have to be in isolation. If we're asking for help then we're weak, we can't handle it on our own.

But the fact is, we're not designed to be like that. We're designed to be creatures that live in community, and work together and help each other, when I was growing up, when I was little, my grandma was over every day. We lived in the same town, and she took us to the park. She would take us to her house for sleepovers or just to hang out, so my mom could get stuff done or sleep or work.

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We just don't have that as much anymore. People live further away from their families. We're having kids when we're older. There are just a lot of reasons why we don't have that family structure that we used to have. And people are really, really suffering. There's a significant increase in a lot of issues, postpartum mental health issues. I mean, a lot of that increase is just because we're actually recognizing and diagnosing it more, which is amazing.

But I think a lot of it is so exacerbated by not having enough support. So, how do you get support? How do you get help, either when you're newly postpartum, or have a brand-new baby? Or even down the road when you have older kids? Maybe you have a few kids, maybe you're shuttling them to different sports and activities, or preschool and music class, and all these different things. You're working, your partner's working, or maybe you're a single parent, and you need help.

Frankly, not everyone can afford professional help. This is what my business does, we provide hands-on support to new parents. I've been a nanny, and I know a lot of people who have nannies or have help. It's great, but even that sometimes is not enough, or not exactly what you need help with. Like, you don't necessarily need someone to take care of your kids.

So, we're going to talk today about a few different factors that come into play. And some real tips and strategies for being able to get the help and support that you need, in order to run your family, run your life, take care of your kids, take care of yourself, and just have an all-around smoother and easier experience.

The first thing I want to say is that I want everybody to start with the assumption that people *want* to help you. I think, again, culturally, there's this idea that, people would be put out if we ask them for anything. Their lives are busy, our lives are busy. It's too much to ask of somebody, even if they're a family member or a close friend. We just shouldn't do it because then they're going to feel bad that they can't help, or that they don't want to, or that they don't have time, or whatever.

I want everyone to just assume that people want to help you and think about how you would feel if a friend asked you to help them with something. Would

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you be like, “Oh my God, I can't believe this person asked me to help them with this thing. Argh, that's crazy. How dare she? I hate her. I don't want to be friends with her anymore.” Probably not, right?

You might be like, “Okay, yeah, that's a lot. I have a lot on my plate. I can't really do that.” You would at least want to try in any way that you could. And I want you to believe that your friends and the people around you care about you enough to want to try to help you as much as possible whenever they can. So, we're going to start with that assumption.

The next thing is you want to really figure out exactly what you need help with. What are the things that are most overwhelming to you, that you want to do the least, or that would just be the most helpful to have? For instance, if you really want somebody to watch your kids for a little while so that you can organize things in the house. Or so that you can take a break or take a nap. Or go out, if you miss seeing people and having a relaxed evening not having to deal with your kids. That means you need childcare help.

Do you need help with laundry? Do you just hate doing it? Is it piling up? Personally, I love washing and drying laundry. I hate folding it and putting away. I hate that chore. I don't really cook, my partner cooks. But if you feel like you're the person cooking, and it's overwhelming and exhausting and you just can't do it anymore... Or maybe it's just the decision-making process of what to make, what help do we even need.

You want to try to sit down and just write down everything that you have to do in the course of a day. And then, pick the things that you hate the most, or that are the most overwhelming, and those are the things that you need help with.

Then, think about who you can ask to help you. For instance, if your mom lives nearby, or your dad or a family member, be like, “Hey, can you come over for a couple hours and help me get some of this laundry done?” I, as a friend, separate from as a doula because it's kind of our job to anticipate needs, but just me as a person, as a friend... If a friend says to me...

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For instance, a friend of mine has cancer right now. She's doing okay, but she's in chemo and she's struggling. We live in New York City, and she doesn't have laundry in her apartment, but I do. So, I go over and pick up her laundry, I wash it and bring it back to her. That's something that she really needed help with. But she asked me to do that. She was like, "I have cancer. I'm going to be going through these treatments. These are the things that I need help with."

If she had just said, "I need help," I would be like, "Yes, I would love to help you. I really want to help you. But I don't know what to offer to do, what to volunteer for, or what you need." So, the fact that she asked me specifically, "I really need help with laundry," great, that's fine. "I'm so happy to help you with that. I can do that, no problem." And it feels really good to be able to support her in that way.

She has other friends who do things like drive her to the appointments. She had a friend that she stayed with after surgery who took care of her, which was amazing. But she is such a master class in asking specifically for what she needs support with.

When she was going in for one of her surgeries, she asked me if I would be willing to take her and stay with her until they took her in. "Yes, absolutely." I have a flexible schedule, so I was able to do that. Maybe if she had asked someone who had a job with an office they had to be at it wouldn't have been possible.

But at the very least give people the opportunity to know exactly what would be helpful. "Hey, can I drop my kids off to your house for a couple of hours? Can you come over here for a couple of hours and watch them so that I can do what I need to do?" That's something that is really going to help you get the help that you need. I have been saying the word "help" a lot, so I'm going to try to replace it with some synonyms, like "assistance" or "aid".

Another thing that I really love is the camaraderie between you and friends and fellow parents. It's something that I saw a lot with my mom when I was a kid growing up, that I think we don't have so much anymore. But it's super. Something I noticed when I was a nanny, particularly a nanny for a stay-at-home

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mom... She had twins, baby twins, and she just couldn't handle them alone, by herself all day. Because two, that's a lot.

So, I was there to help her. But it wasn't like I was taking care of the babies, and she was just doing her own thing, or that each of us was taking care of one baby. Sometimes it was like that, but honestly, a lot of the time, it felt more like we were just two friends hanging out and sort of sharing responsibilities.

Maybe she'd be making lunch for everybody, and I would be taking care of the kids. Or I would take the kids out on a walk, and she would get to take care of some work that she needed to take care of. Or she would want to play with the babies, and hang out with them and be with them, so I would do the dishes or do the laundry, or whatever. We also just kept each other company, which was so nice. I mean, obviously you're not going to get along with everybody to spend all day every day with them.

But it was just so nice to have somebody else there to talk to and not feel so isolated and alone. Because I know, both as a nanny and as a mom, when you're alone with a little kid all day you're not having adult conversations. You're not stimulating your brain. And it can get pretty isolating and pretty boring and pretty lonely.

So, definitely think about, how can I bring someone else into this? How can I work together with someone? Do I have a friend with a kid of a similar age? Maybe they could come over for a playdate.

I could say to the mom, "Hey, do you mind if, while you're here on the playdate, I do some laundry? While you guys are here on the playdate, I make some phone calls and you just watch both kids for an hour? And then, you know what? Next week, we'll do the playdate at your house. I can help with your laundry, and you can make your phone calls, and do the things that you need to do." I think that that could just be so huge.

I've known some moms that I've been friends with for years, who would literally have a planned time to get together at each other's houses and just help each other with these things.

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I know, even for me without kids, if I have a friend over sitting on the couch, even if I'm on the phone with somebody, I am going to be so much more productive. Puttering around, and just having somebody to talk to and interact with. I'm going to load my dishwasher, where maybe if nobody was there, I wouldn't be doing that because I would be texting people to have an interaction. Or I would be reading or something like that.

But having someone there when I'm talking, I want to keep my hands busy. So, I start putting things away, organizing, sweeping the floor, all these things. It can just be so helpful to have company. Even just having somebody over so that you can just feel like you can be a little bit more productive.

Really think about how you can team up with some fellow parents... doesn't have to just be moms, it can certainly be anybody... and keep each other company while you do chores, or maybe share chores. Or maybe there's chores that you hate doing that somebody else loves.

Like, I'll wash anybody's laundry. You want to drop it off at my house? I'll wash it all, dry it, I'll throw it in a basket, and you can fold it and put it away. Maybe you don't want to do that. Or maybe you don't have access to laundry, like my friend who I'm helping out with that.

Maybe you have a friend who really loves to cook, and she cooks these beautiful meals for her family, and you just struggle to figure out what to make and you hate cooking. And you're like me, so you're just like, "Can we just have spaghetti and cereal again? Let's just do that. Let's have scrambled eggs because it's easier." And you say, "Hey, why don't I do all the grocery shopping for us, and you just make double the food and drop it off in my house?"

Friends of mine who cook would freaking love to do that. I mean, I have friends who cook for tons of people. If somebody loves to cook, they don't mind cooking a little bit more. Especially if it's something that's super easy to just make more of when you're already making it.

Maybe you're a good person in the kitchen but you're not such a great cook. So, maybe you're like, "I'll chop all the vegetables and bring them over, and then you

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just do the cooking.” How can you team up? How can you each play to your strengths and not do those chores that you hate. Because honestly, doing a chore or a task that you hate takes so much more mental energy than doing something that you enjoy or feel neutral about.

There was that show a bunch of years ago, *Big Love*, about a guy who had three wives; they were Mormon. The three wives lived in neighboring houses. So, all three houses were next to each other, they shared a backyard, he had kids with all of them, and he would rotate between the houses.

But the thing that was so interesting was the way the three sister-wives would share the responsibilities. One would watch the other ones' kids. I forget the exact details, but it definitely felt like one of them was doing everybody's laundry because she didn't mind doing that.

Think about that. How can we work as a team, to advance everyone and help everyone's family run more smoothly and go better? Carpools, what has happened to carpools? Why do we not carpool anymore? I mean, I think it's mostly because of increased car seat regulations, which I'm super for, that's amazing. But it does make things like carpooling much more difficult.

But is there a way that you can, maybe not exactly drive other people's kids, but a way to make the process easier for people, for taking your kids to the million activities? For instance, I had a friend who had older kids and she had a baby. She had to take the older kids to school and walk them in; I guess they were younger and preschool age or whatever.

She's like, “Oh, you know what? It's such a hassle. Especially in the winter, getting the baby out of the car and bringing him in, just to walk the kids in. It's such a pain. I wish I didn't have to do it.”

And I said, “I bet you're not the only one with this problem. Is there another mom who's doing the same thing, who has a baby and is bringing her kids into the building? Maybe you guys could trade off. Park next to each other and leave the babies in the car. One mom just stands there and watches both babies while they're in the car, and the other mom walks all the kids into school.

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She ended up finding someone where they could do that, and it worked out great. It was such a game changer, because, as she said, here's the problem, I know what I need help with, and then I was able to offer a suggestion, a solution. So, when you identify the problem, and you identify the help that you need, and you're willing to have someone else support you and ask them for that, that's fantastic.

When my sister was little, she was in a preschool and a dance class. The dance class was on Friday mornings, and she had preschool on Friday afternoons. There was another mom with her daughter in this exact same routine, same dance class, same preschool.

And one day, this mom suggested to my mom, "Instead of us both sitting here all day, and driving these kids around all day, why don't we switch off on Fridays? We both drop our kids off at dance in the morning, then we switch off. One of us takes both kids home, feeds them lunch, and takes them to preschool. And then, we each pick our kid up at the end of the day." I mean, my mom freakin' loved that, it was so brilliant.

Again, maybe you're not letting somebody else drive your kid, or maybe you don't feel comfortable with that, but maybe if you live in a city and it's a situation where it's walking... Because, honestly, a lot of the time, taking care of two three-year-olds or two four-year-olds, or certainly two five- or six-year-old or older kids, is almost easier than taking care of just one, because they play with each other and they entertain each other.

So, can you and another parent switch off playdates? "One day you take my kid. The other day I take your kid," and then that's your free time. You don't have to pay a nanny because you're trading off the babysitting. Maybe different couples trade off date night babysitting. One person goes over to the other one's house and babysits. And then they babysit for you, so that you guys can have a date night out.

How can you exchange helping each other? What are some creative, outside-of-the-box things that we can think of to make this process easier for everyone?

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Now, sometimes there are just some things that you can't get a friend or family member to help you with, or you just can't find anyone who's willing to do that, or you don't feel comfortable asking them to do that. Like, I might not feel comfortable asking a family member to fold my partner's underwear. That's just a little bit of a boundary that we may not want to cross. In that case, you can hire someone.

I know that sounds very simple, and it's not affordable to everyone, but I also think that we have this paradigm in our minds that you either have a full-time housekeeper, and “When I'm rich, I will have a maid and she will do everything.” It doesn't have to be like that.

I have a personal assistant that comes over and puts my laundry away, organizes, unloads the dishwasher, for four hours a week. It could even be less; it could even be two hours a week. You could get a college student or even a high school student to do some basic stuff for you, that's going to really change the game.

I mean, I started hiring someone to help me with the laundry and that kind of stuff, when I really didn't have a lot of money. But I was starting my business and I was working all the time with clients. I would have this very minimal time off at home, like maybe one evening a week, because I was literally working six overnights. I'd be spending the whole evening putting laundry away and unpacking my suitcase from going stay with a live-in client, and then repacking it for the next one.

I was like, “This is crazy, I get no downtime.” So, I would much rather pay someone \$15 or \$20/hour for three hours, to just do all those chores for me so that they could be off my mind, and I wouldn't have to think about them.

So, there are lots of resources and lots of ways you can find this. You can put up a sign at the grocery store, on the bulletin board. Or if you live in an apartment building, on the apartment bulletin board or website, or whatever. You can put an ad on a nanny search, or a help search website, like Care.com. They have personal assistants. You can find somebody that way.

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You can reach out to people in your neighborhood, on a neighborhood website, or Facebook or social media, and just let them know that you want someone X number of hours a week for this or that. Maybe you want someone to run errands for you. That's something I didn't mention earlier.

When you're thinking about trading off with your friends, if you're going to the grocery store text your friends, be like, "Hey, can I pick you guys up anything, and drop it off your house on my way home from the store? I'd be happy to do that." And then the next time they go to the store, they'll do the same for you.

So, yeah, maybe you want some help running errands. Because it's really hard to get your kid packed up and out of the house, especially in certain types of weather; too hot, too cold, rain, and that kind of thing. So, how can you really maximize hiring someone, even a small amount of time, to just be hugely helpful?

It's normal for parents who work outside of the home to have childcare, so I think they don't really think anything of it. But if you aren't working or you're working part time... aren't working outside the home, I should say, because every parent is working very hard... it can feel like you don't deserve to have someone helping you. Or you don't deserve to have part-time childcare, or a mother's helper, or an occasional babysitter or whatever.

But you absolutely do. What other job in the world expects you to be there 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, besides parenting? Or if you are doing that, you're getting paid a lot of overtime for that time. But parenting just doesn't work like that. So, don't ever feel ashamed or embarrassed of wanting to have some part-time help or full-time help. There's absolutely nothing wrong with it. The more, the better, if it's something that's affordable to you. And if it's not, there are a lot of ways you can figure out how to get that support.

The last thing I want to talk about, that I think is really important when we're talking about asking for and accepting help, letting people help you, is letting them help you. Let them do things, even if it's not it's exactly the way you would do it. This is especially important if it's someone that's spending a lot of time with

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you, like your partner, your family members, your mom, your dad, your mother-in-law, whoever.

If you ask them for help, and they do it a different way than you would do it but it gets done, then don't worry about it. Let them do it. For years I've worked with parents, and a lot of the time it is a hetero-couple dynamic where the mom gives birth to the baby, and the dad is the dad, and is there.

I see it sometimes with same-sex couples, but there's just a little bit of a different dynamic when you haven't been socialized as a woman and a man in a hetero relationship. So, I'm going to mainly speak to that, but it does apply to any sort of relationship.

The woman tends to take the lead, because she gave birth, she's nursing, she's home with the baby, the dad went back to work. And there's so much more pressure on women to just do everything perfectly and be perfect mums, and dads don't have that pressure. She'll complain and complain that the dad doesn't help. And yes, this is a big problem, especially with straight men not being helpful. Partly because they don't know how, and partly because they haven't been raised to be, that's just not the expectation.

But complaining that they don't help, and then I would see him offer to help and her say, "No, don't do it like that. No, not like that. No, you have to do this. No, you have to do that. No..." Let him figure it out, the same way you figured it out. In the beginning, you didn't come to this magically knowing what to do. But you also didn't have anybody breathing down your neck telling you you're doing it wrong all the time. Let them find their own way.

I hate to make this comparison, but much like I talked in the previous episode about letting your kids help with cleanup and things like that, they're not going to be perfect right away. Give them space to figure it out. I mean, unless they're doing something super unsafe, like not buckling them into the highchair or not doing the car seat correctly, don't micromanage them. They will figure out their own way of doing things, and if it's not perfect, it's still done. And they'll just get better over time.

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So, that is how you can get a lot more help and support in your life, by asking for it, figuring out outside-of-the-box ways to do it, accepting it, and letting people help you even if they're not doing it exactly the way that you would.

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