

Help Is NOT a Four-Letter Word

Foreword

By Dr. Monica Basco

Self-sufficiency Syndrome is a new way to describe a stressful life condition that plagues many hard-working Americans. While self-sufficiency is generally considered something to aspire to, this book describes how, if taken to extremes, it can become a set of behaviors and attitudes that can leave you feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, or unsatisfied. In other words, if not used judiciously, self-sufficiency becomes a negative coping strategy. Much like the concept of perfectionism, which has a good side, but is a problem if it becomes a life-guiding principle, self-sufficiency can have costs.

Although not intended as a psychotherapy book, the concepts for making changes described in *Help Is Not a Four Letter Word* are consistent with many of the strategies used in cognitive-behavior therapy, a well-known and rigorously tested form of psychotherapy. The desire to be self-sufficient stems from holding a belief that self-sufficiency is admirable or necessary. When a situation arises that stimulates the urge to take action, the belief that one must handle it alone is evoked. This kind of thought is called a schema according to cognitive-behavioral theory. Schemas are firmly held values, attitudes, biases, and standards. They develop early in life through instruction from parents, teachers, and significant others or from other key learning experiences. In the case of self-sufficiency, the schema that it is important to take care of things on your own may have been learned by watching mom or dad struggle to solve a problem without asking for help, like fixing the car instead of taking it to a mechanic or stressing over the need to serve home-cooked meals even when there isn't enough time.

Many self-reliant people recognize the need for inter-dependence and readily embrace the values of cooperation and collaboration to achieve the goals and meet the needs of others. They eagerly offer their time to work for the greater good. The problem is that when the need is personal, self-sufficients have a double standard, "It is OK for others to accept aid, but I can take care of myself." In this situation, their actions of going it alone do not match with their value of collaboration. Chapter 7 challenges you to contrast your actions with your values, this is another intervention strategy commonly used in psychotherapy and in motivational interviewing. A goal of this book is to help you act in a way that is congruent with your basic beliefs. Sometimes that means changing your actions, like acting less self-sufficient and more like a team member. Sometimes it means changing your views, like deciding that there is more value in inter-dependence than in going it alone.

What self-sufficients do not realize is that there is no real prize for doing it alone. You get the same rewards (or lack of rewards) as those who operate in a more collaborative fashion and achieve the same goals with far less wear and tear. Seeing this is the key to change. This insightful and revealing book opens the door to inter-dependence. It welcomes in weary self-sufficients and shows them how to find comfort in sharing their burdens with others.

Changing beliefs is difficult to accomplish. You can't just give up the old idea at will. You have to have a good reason for making such a dramatic change. This book helps you to evaluate the pros and cons of believing that you have to be self-sufficient. Through exploration of what drives your self-sufficiency you might find that the reasons to insist on doing it yourself no longer exist or are outweighed by the disadvantage of continuing to think and act this way.

The strategies for change provided in the latter chapters of the book are those that many cognitive behavior therapists find useful in helping people modify destructive schemas. For example, Ms. Collins encourages readers to become aware of extreme self-sufficiency, and then to rewrite beliefs so that they are more flexible and allow room for asking others to help. Although reformulated, it is often difficult to make permanent changes in a life-long belief system. The ten steps to making changes described in Chapter Eight will help you to make a transition from the excessively self-sufficient to the sufficient self. They include focusing on the positive nature of your new and more flexible schemas, visualizing how these changes will affect everyday life, and creating an action plan for approaching life without all the restrictions of self-sufficiency. To reinforce your new and healthier attitude, you are encouraged to observe others who emulate the sufficient self you want to be, seek out encouragers who will support your changes, and celebrate each step along the way.

The self-sufficiency syndrome is a personal and common sense guide to doing less and enjoying life more. I highly recommend this to perfectionists, workaholics, type A personalities, and do-it-yourselfers. By reading this book and taking time to consider its message, you will undoubtedly conclude that there is little to lose and much to be gained by being less self-sufficient and enjoying the benefits of inter-dependence with others.

Professional speaker and trainer, Peggy Collins, is the author of *Help Is Not a Four-Letter Word: Why Doing It All Is Doing You In*, published by McGraw Hill.

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