

How to Actually Help a Caregiver

A one-page cheat sheet for friends – what to say, what to do, what not to say

Say this

- "I'm bringing dinner Thursday. Doorstep drop or eat together?"
- "I have a free 2 hours on Saturday. Want me to sit with [person] so you can leave the house?"
- "I'm not asking how you're doing to fix anything. I just want to know."

Don't say this

- Don't say: "You're so strong." (It sounds like a medal for suffering. They didn't sign up for it.)
- Don't say: "Let me know what you need." (It puts the work back on them. They're already doing all the work.)
- Don't say: "He's in a better place" or any version of "look on the bright side."

Do this

- Wash one load of dishes silently. Don't announce it. Just do it.
- Bring food in a container you don't need back.
- Take out the trash. Water the plant. Feed the pet. The invisible chores are the loudest.

Don't do this

- **Don't wait to be asked. Waiting is the failure mode. Act.**
- **Don't ask "what can I do?" with no follow-up. Offer one specific thing instead.**
- **Don't make your visit another thing they have to host.**

Why "You're So Strong" Lands Wrong

It sounds like praise. It lands like distance. "You're so strong" is what you say to someone who's handling it – which implies you believe they're handling it, which means they can't tell you they're not. The caregiver who hears "you're so strong" learns that their weakness is unwelcome. What actually helps: witnessing without verdict. "This is hard. I see you doing it. I'm here."

The 3-Sentence Check-In

I'm not here to fix anything. I'm here because you matter to me. Tell me one true thing about how you're doing – no bright side required.

That's it. No advice. No "you should." Just a door.

The 10-Minute Help Menu

Give them a menu instead of an open question. Concrete tasks, small time boxes.

- **Bring a meal (they'll eat anything)**
- **Sit with [person] for 2 hours so they can leave the house**
- **Pick up groceries (they'll send a list)**
- **Take out the trash + recycling**
- **Walk the dog / feed the pet / water the plants**
- **Make one phone call so they don't have to hold the phone**
- **Just come over and exist near them. No conversation needed.**
- **Send a text that doesn't require a response**
- **Take over one chore, one time, without being asked**
- **Sit in the waiting room with them**

Pick one. Put it in a calendar. Show up.

For the Friend: A Small Reflection

You opened this because you want to help. That already puts you ahead of most people. Three questions worth sitting with:

- **What's one thing you've said to a caregiver that you now realize might have landed wrong? It's not too late – a repair is just an honest "I think I said the wrong thing. How can I actually help?"**
- **What's one specific thing from the menu you could do this week, without waiting to be asked?**
- **Who is a caregiver you've been meaning to check on? Send them the one-pager. Tell them: "this is what I want to be for you. Pick anything."**
- **Remember: The best help is specific, scheduled, and doesn't need a thank-you. You don't have to fix the situation. You just have to be one small hand on the wheel.**
- **[/blog/friends-guide-to-helping](#)**
- **[/blog/checking-in-vs-showing-up](#)**
- **[/blog/caregiver-guilt-manifesto](#)**

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