IDENTIFYING SOURCES OF SUPPORT AND FRIENDSHIP

What is a Support Network?
People experiencing major life stresses cope better if they have the support of family and friends. Informal networks are the personal ties you have with others. These networks may include friends, relatives, and other people you turn to for comfort.

Your support system is an excellent way to help you through tough times. In reaching out to others and taking advantage of their friendship, you can receive the strength you need to deal with your problems.

Having a support group benefits everyone in many ways:

- Someone listens to your concerns.
- They help you think about options you might not have come up with on your own.
- There is comfort available when you are depressed.
- Financial or material needs can be met.

How do I build a support network?
Many times when people experience loss (divorce, job loss, etc.), they withdraw from their support network. Church attendance may cease. In reality, this is the worst thing they can do. When you are suffering from a loss, you need to draw help from your support network. You also need to make new friendships to add to your network.

Supportive friendships often come about indirectly from working and socializing with others. In order for this to occur, it is often necessary to first reach out to others.

- Take time for your family.
- Volunteer your time to community groups and organizations.
- Visit your neighbors and friends.
- Join a club or hobby. The worksheet on the back of this page may help you identify your support network. The people in your support network are an important part of your life. You depend on them. In turn, you also give them support.

In addition to your personal support network, you can call upon community agencies for support. See the fact sheet in this series, “Community Agencies that Can
Help,” for community services that are available. The following questions can help you identify and develop a support system. Write in the names of the people who give you support.

- Who listens when you need to talk?
  ______________________________________________________________________

- With whom do you share your news, good or bad?
  ______________________________________________________________________

- Who do you know that makes you feel appreciated?
  ______________________________________________________________________

- Who stands up for you, even though they may not agree with what you are doing?
  ______________________________________________________________________

- Who do you go to when you need advice?
  ______________________________________________________________________

- To whom do you turn when you have a problem?
  ______________________________________________________________________

- Who helps you make decisions when you need to think things through?
  ______________________________________________________________________

As you look over the people you named, ask yourself these questions:

- Are you leaning too heavily on a particular person?

- Do you have needs that are not being met? Which of these needs are the most important to you now?

- Who else could fill the needs you have?

- Are you able to risk asking others to help you?

- What specific action could you take to expand your support network?
SURVIVING TOUGH TIMES

*Surviving Tough Times* is a 19-part series for individuals and families experiencing underemployment and unemployment. Originally developed by Linda Boelter, University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension Service.

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