

Getting Help

Laura MacNiven, Director of Health Education, Springboard Clinic

Getting Help: A Reminder to Reach Out Today in the midst of a Toronto snow storm, I was driving down Yonge Street and saw a middle-aged woman slip on the ice and fall hard at the edge of the road. Then, a young guy – who may not have been described as particularly approachable – put out his hand and pulled her up. Although I was in my car and away from them, I could see that he seemed to say something friendly, patted her on the back, and then they walked together half a block before separating.

It was such a quick moment, but I relished it: him reaching out, her taking his hand, and the willingness of two complete strangers to connect.

I thought about that moment all day.

Like a lyric you can't drop, or a picture you can't forget, I kept re-creating the scene in my mind. Did this woman usually keep to herself, but her guard was temporary let down from the fall? Did the man hesitate before he outstretched his hand? Or did he reach out on reflex?

I was fascinated by their momentary vulnerability, by the openness of this gesture, and realized there was a message here about getting help.

When a client arrives at Springboard Clinic, it can sometimes be the first time they have ever sought support. When you have ADHD, your symptoms are often so internal that it can be difficult to reach out for assistance.

Throughout your life you've struggled with getting homework done. You've wished that you could be less impulsive with your words. You've often felt like a hurricane and every day has seemed like you were in an unwinnable race...

...but you've always been smart and well intentioned. So maybe everyone just told you that you needed to try harder.

Nobody reached out their hand to you because they couldn't see you falling.

Because of this, you can see why somebody struggling with attentional difficulties may be hesitant to seek support, and why having an assessment can be such an eye-opening experience.

I have heard many parents and partners say (in a particular tone), “If we accept that they have ADHD, they’re going to ‘use it as an excuse.’ By supporting their need for help, we will be weakening them. Everyone has a difficult time paying attention sometimes, and they just need to learn to take some responsibility.”

That’s not how I see it.

With an assessment, you’re starting the process of externalizing your frustrations and opening yourself up for change. You’re learning where you’re different, what your strengths are, why you’re struggling, and evaluating where you want to move forward, so that you can move forward.

Yes, you make yourself vulnerable, which yes, can be very difficult, but it is an essential part of seeking help.

So keep that in mind this February. If you feel like you’re struggling and nobody seems to notice you falling, remember that the only way those around you can reach out a hand is if you share your difficulties and they know you need help.

I’m sure the lady who fell on Yonge Street wished that she would disappear immediately when it happened – but she didn’t have the choice. Her struggle was on the outside, she was forced to be vulnerable, and she got help. You can too.