



SESSION 16

Support—Getting It and Giving It

One of the important outcomes of participating in the *Owning Up* program is being able to know who, how, and when to ask for help. Many young people assume that going to adults is “snitching” or weak and will always make a problem worse. This session challenges this belief and encourages students to both seek and give support. That said, it is critical to acknowledge that students may have had experiences where people who were supposed to support them didn’t—or even exacerbated the problem. But not all people are like that, and this session’s goal is to focus on the people who can truly be helpful.

OBJECTIVES

- ▶ To help girls identify their support network and encourage them to work to strengthen the relationships that support them
- ▶ To examine reasons it can be difficult to ask for help and support when you need it
- ▶ To convey the importance of strengthening relationships with other girls to build a support network against social isolation
- ▶ To help girls learn how to give each other supportive advice

MATERIALS

Copies of the *Web of Support* handout

Index cards

Pencils or pens

Optional: Copies of the *Advice Situations* handout

PREPARATIONS

Write the situations from the “Talk About It” exercise on individual index cards, if you wish.

SESSION OUTLINE

Review It

Review the assignment from the previous session and answer any questions students may have.

Set It Up

In this session, we’ll think about the people in our lives who support us and what it’s like to ask for help when we need it. First, what is support?

Help students arrive at a definition including the ideas of giving comfort, emotional help, approval, and encouragement. You can share that the word comes from the Latin, a combination of “sub” (from below) and “portare” (to carry).

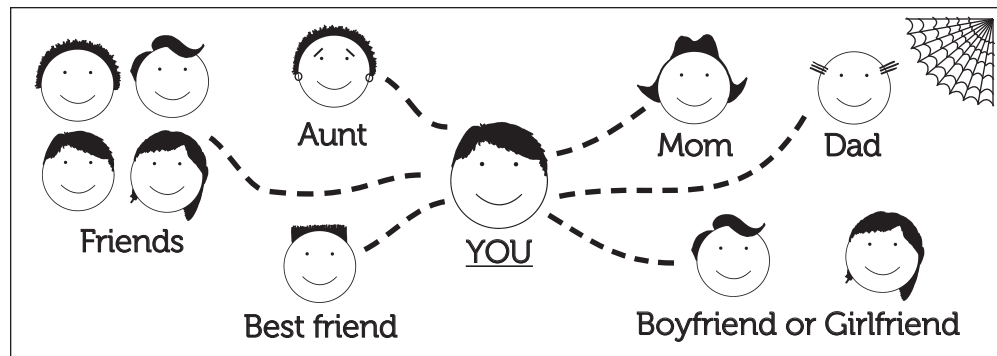
Sometimes women and girls have a hard time supporting each other, so we’ll look at how we can change that through what we have learned in the *Owing Up* program.

Web of Support

Ask students to think about a time they were in trouble and really needed help from someone. If there is enough trust in the group, ask for volunteers to tell about their situations. Discuss the following questions.

- ▶ What are the most important qualities of a supportive person?
- ▶ Do you get support from friends? Who supports you, and how do they support you?
- ▶ Do you get support from someone you have an intimate relationship with?
- ▶ Who is the person in your family you think is best to seek out for comfort or advice?
- ▶ Who is the adult person in your life—a teacher in any capacity, coach, religious leader—you think is best to seek out for comfort or advice?

Explain that people who help you form a Web of Support. Give each student two copies of the “Web of Support” handout and ask them to draw their Web of Support as it existed last year or six months ago on one copy, then as it exists now on the other copy.



After they have drawn the two webs, have students pair up and discuss their support networks, past and present. Have them consider these questions.

- ▶ What are the strengths and challenges in your support networks, then and now?
- ▶ Could you make your support network stronger? How could you do that?

Reconvene the large group and share as time permits.

Asking for Support

Point out that everyone needs help and support at some point, but sometimes it's difficult to ask for and accept it. Discuss these questions.

- ▶ Have you ever really wanted to ask someone for help but didn't do it? What stopped you?
- ▶ Have you ever resisted someone who was trying to help you, even though you really needed and wanted the help? If so, why?
- ▶ How could this person have gotten through to you in a way that you would have listened and accepted the help?

Paraphrase the following.

People who support you sometimes are in the position of telling you hard truths that are difficult to hear. The person who fits this definition is your ally—someone you can go to for help, advice, and feedback, even if some of that is hard to hear. Everyone needs at least one adult ally, if at all possible.

Remind students that part of the first session's assignment was to identify one adult ally. At this point, you can ask the girls to talk or write a paragraph about this person—or they could just take a minute to think about the person. Have their thoughts about who is a good ally changed from the first session?

Girls Supporting Girls

Girls often say, "I don't have girlfriends" or "I don't trust other girls" or "I just can't talk to girls."

Ask the following questions.

- ▶ What would make a girl feel this way about other girls?
- ▶ What is the best way to get a girl who doesn't trust other girls to change her mind—to believe that some girls are worthy of her trust?
- ▶ If you knew a girl who didn't trust other girls, what could you do to strengthen your friendship with her?
- ▶ If you are a girl who doesn't trust other girls, why would it be worth it to risk trusting girls?

Focus discussion on how girls do and don't support each other and how girls can form support networks for each other.

TALK ABOUT IT

Have students form small groups. Give each group an index card on which one of the following situations is written and have them come up with supportive advice.

1. Your friend is upset because her parents are getting a divorce.
2. Your friend is really jealous of a girl she used to be friends with. Your friend wants to stop talking behind this girl's back but just doesn't know how.
3. Your friend tells you she's angry at another girl who is forcing her to choose between hanging out with her and other people.
4. Your friend wants to confront her abusive boyfriend.
5. You are worried that your friend is abusing drugs.

Ask a student from each group to share their advice. As they do, emphasize the importance of giving supportive advice, not advice meant to hurt and criticize. Point out that advice can be easy to offer but hard to accept.

Wrap It Up

Give students a chance to ask questions or comment about the session. Leave students with the following thoughts.

- ▶ It is critical to find an ally. Sometimes an ally's support will come in the form of telling you things you don't want to hear.
- ▶ It's common to have problems that are too big to handle by yourself. You are demonstrating courage and wisdom when you ask for support.

ASSIGNMENT

Put your Web of Support in a private place (maybe where you have placed your Friendship Bill of Rights), where you can refer to it whenever you need it.

Bonus Activity: Advice Column

Distribute copies of the “Advice Situations” handout and have each girl choose a situation and write a response. When the girls have finished, they can share their responses with the larger group. Emphasize the value of supportive, not critical, advice.

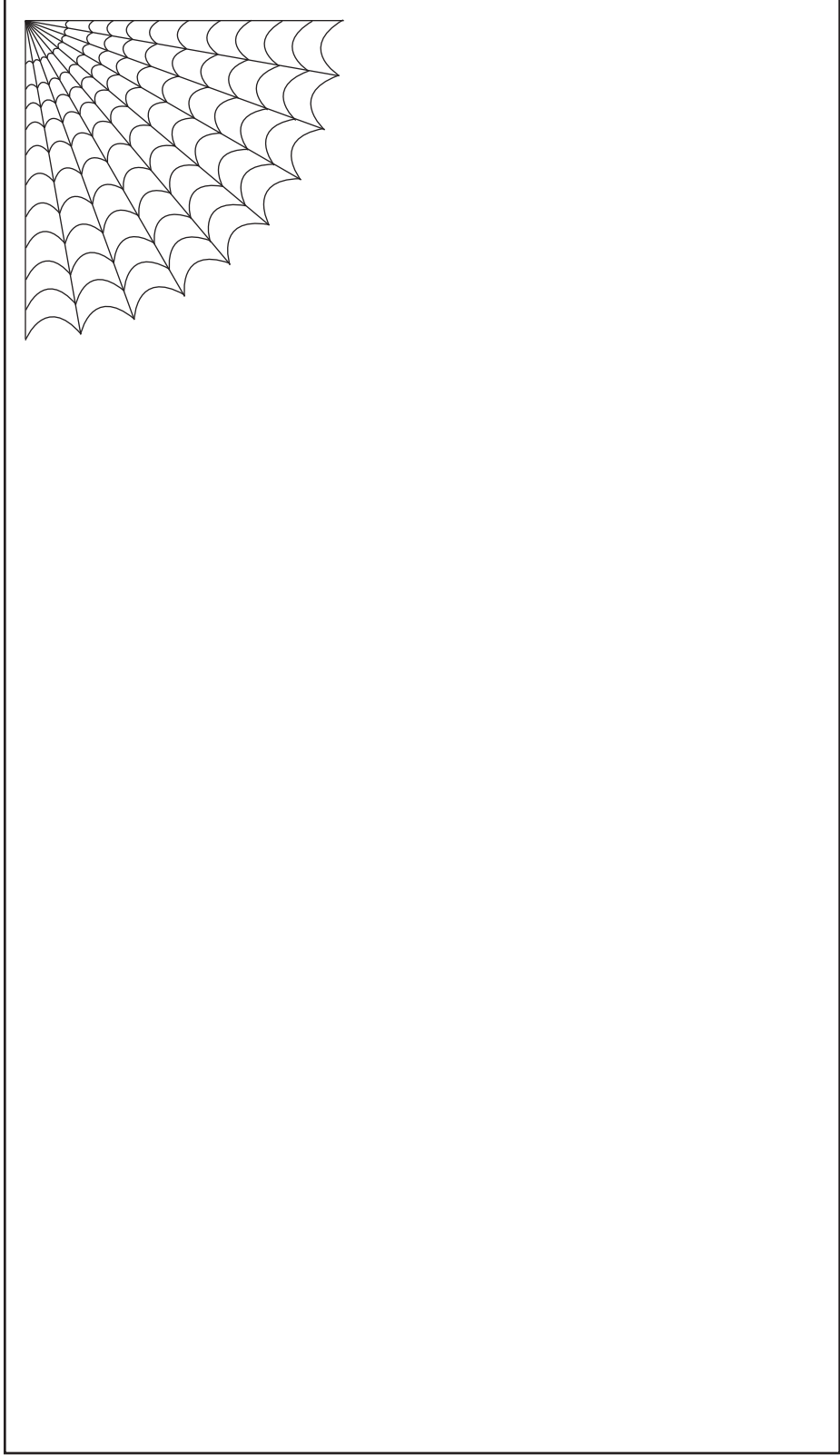


Think About It

1. What does it mean to you to have someone support you?
2. How bad does a situation have to be for you to feel justified in asking for help?
3. Why do people so often feel that they aren't in control of their lives if they ask for help?
4. If you believe it is weak to ask for help, why do you think you believe that?
5. Have you ever been an ally to someone in the way we discussed in the session? How did that feel?
6. What do you think are the most important qualities for an effective ally to have? Do you demonstrate those qualities with your friends and family? Do they demonstrate those qualities with you?



Web of Support



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Advice Situations

You have an advice column for your school paper. A younger student writes in about a problem. Choose one of the following scenarios. Using SEAL and other information you've learned in this program, how would you advise her to work out her problem?

1. I know my friend is mad at me, but she won't admit it to my face. Instead, she ignores me and is really fake. What do I do?
2. My friend is always trying to copy me. It's really weird. I try telling her to get her own style, but she doesn't change. Now I feel like she's forcing me to be mean to her. What do I do?
3. I'm so worried about everything—school, friends, my family. Also, most people at school seem to have more money than me. I mean, there's no way my parents could afford half of the things a lot of the students have at this school. I'm trying to do things right, but it's just getting harder and harder. Sometimes I just want to disappear. How do I get these feelings to go away?
4. I have a friend who is obsessed about her weight. She throws up regularly after she eats. I've told her she's not fat, but nothing I do or say changes anything. Now I'm starting to question my body and feel like I'm fat. What can I do to help her and myself?
5. I know my boyfriend is cheating on me, but when I confront him he won't admit it. How can I get him to stop lying to me? Should I dump him?
6. My parents are always on my case about school and work. They constantly tell me how lazy I am. I don't know how to talk to them anymore. Can you give me advice on how to talk to them without blowing up or shutting down?