

Reaching Out for Help

By Mark Goulston

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Dear Mom and Dad,

I'm writing you this letter, because I'm afraid if I tell you how unhappy I am, you'll become angry or frightened, or even worse, you'll tell me I'm just trying to make excuses or trying to get attention. Then I'll have to take it back and reassure you that it's nothing and I'm okay— when I'm really not. I really don't know what's wrong, and I know I don't deserve to feel as bad as I do because other people have it much worse. But I can't help it, I do feel as bad as I do. I feel very alone and that nobody in the world knows me— and I'm so confused, that I couldn't even tell anyone what I want them to know about me. Read this enclosed poem and it might help you to know how I'm feeling. I'm really sorry if I'm a big disappointment to you. Please don't be angry at me for being so ashamed of me. Can you please help me?

Love,

DON'T BE FOOLED BY ME

Don't be fooled by me.
Don't be fooled by the face I wear.
For I wear a thousand masks, masks that I'm afraid to take off.
And none of them are me.
Pretending is an art that's second nature to me.
But don't be fooled, for God's sake, don't be fooled.
I give the impression that I'm secure,
That all is sunny and unruffled with me,
Within as well as without,
That confidence is my name and coolness my game,
That the water's calm and I'm in command,
And that I need no one.
But don't believe me, please.
My surface may seem smooth, but my surface is my mask.
Beneath this lies no complacency.
Beneath dwells the real me in confusion, in fear and aloneness.
But I hide this. I don't want anybody to know it.
I panic at the thought of my weakness and fear of being exposed.
That's why I frantically create a mask to hide behind,
A nonchalant, sophisticated façade,
To help me pretend, to shield me from the glance that knows.
But such a glance is precisely my salvation. My only salvation.
And I know it.
That is if it's followed by acceptance, if it's followed by love.
It's the only think that will assure me of what I can't assure myself...
That I am worth something.
But I don't dare tell you this. I don't dare. I'm afraid to.
I'm afraid your glance will not be followed by acceptance and love.
I'm afraid you'll think less of me, that you'll laugh at me,
And your laugh would kill me.
I'm afraid that deep down I'm nothing, that I'm no good.
And that you will see this and reject me.
So I play my game. My desperate game.
With a façade of assurance without and a trembling child within.

And so begins the parade of masks. And my life becomes a front.
I idly chatter to you in the suave tones of surface talk.
I tell you everything that is really nothing.
And nothing of what's everything,
Of what's crying within me.
So when I'm going through my routine, do not be fooled by what I'm saying.
What I'd like to be able to say,
What for survival I need to say, but what I can't say,
I dislike hiding, honestly.
I dislike the superficial game I'm playing, the phony game.
I'd really like to be genuine and spontaneous and me.
But you've got to help me. You've got to hold out your hand,
Even when that's the last thing I seem to want.
Only you can wipe away from my eyes the blank stare of breathing death,
Only you can call me into aliveness.
Each time you're kind and gentle and encouraging.
Each time you try to understand because you really care,
My heart begins to grow wings, very small wings, very feeble wings,
But wings.
With your sensitivity and sympathy, and your power of understanding
You can breath life into me, I want you to know that.
I want you to know how important you are to me.
How you can be the creator of the person that is me, if you choose to.
Please choose to.
You alone can break down the wall behind which I tremble.
You alone can remove my mask.
You alone can release me from my shaking world of panic and uncertainty.
Please...do not pass me by.
It will not be easy for you.
A long conviction of worthlessness builds strong walls.
The nearer you approach me, the blinder I strike back.
I fight against the very thing I cry out for.
But I am told that love is stronger than walls,
And in that lies my hope.
Please try to beat down those walls with firm hands,
But with gentle hands...for a child is sensitive...
Who am I, you may wonder. I am someone you know very well.
For I am every man you meet and I am every woman you meet.
I am you and I am me.

[- Charles C. Finn](#)

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