



# Calling for Backup

When Supermom can't take any more,  
it's Superdad to the rescue

By Kelli Wheeler

I sent out the call the other day. It seems I find myself doing it about every other month. No one should be surprised that it usually coincides with my “friend” showing up. But it’s not a given. The need to call for reinforcements can sneak up on me, and sometimes it is not a matter of if but when. It’s just nice to know that in times of crisis, he’s got my back.

“Honey . . .” I begin. The key is to stay calm, not panic. “I’m going to need you to come home a little early today.”

That phrase is like the Bat Signal going out. The response is routine, no hesitation, no judgment. “How early?”

“How about 3:30?”

“Can you make it until 4?”

“I don’t know; things are looking pretty bad. I don’t know how much longer I can keep it together.”

“All right. Stay calm.”

“I am calm. Do I not sound calm to you?” I begin to shriek.

He’s like the composed 911 dispatcher, coolly giving out instructions in a reassuring, soothing manner. “OK, where are you?”

“I’m in the bedroom.”

“Is the door shut?”

“Yes.”

“OK. Good. Is everyone safe?”

“So far, but if you don’t get home soon, I can’t make any promises.”

“All right, stay with me now.

Where are the kids?”

“I finally got them outside. It was bad, honey. God, it’s been bad . . .” My voice starts to break.

His voice raises just a hair, but he remains cool. “Keep it together, honey. I know you can do it. I’ll be home soon and then you can go.”

“I don’t know if I can make it,” I begin to sob. “You don’t understand. It’s just so awful . . . He . . . She . . .”

The breakdown starts to get to him. It always does. “Oh no, honey. Don’t go there. You don’t need to tell me about it. It’ll just make it worse. Stay in your room. Keep them outside. I’ll be home in 15 minutes. Can you make it?”

“Yeah,” I squeak. “I’ll try.”

“Great. Good girl. I’ll see you in a few.”

“Thanks, honey. I appreciate it.”

“No problem.” And I know he means it. That right there is the call for backup. The distress call that goes out when it’s Kids 10, Mommy 0. When I’ve reached into my secret stash of patience and come up empty. The days when I’m doing more yelling than breathing. When the needs of my children have spilled over my levees of love and support. The times when unconditional love threatens to draw up a contract.

The solution for me is to get away and recharge my batteries. To hear my own thoughts again that have been drowned out by a constant barrage of sentences beginning with “Mommy . . .” To have moments of silence and remember what it feels like to not be interrupted. To not have anyone need me for a few hours. To escape the routine of caring for someone else’s needs besides my own.

It may mean losing myself in a movie with a big tub of popcorn and a box of Junior Mints or leisurely

browsing the isles of Barnes & Noble. It could be hopelessly trying to squeeze my butt into some trendy jeans at Forever 21 or getting lost in a Sudoku game in the food court at the mall. It doesn’t matter where I go or what I do, just that I get away and find my sanity. And it’s amazing how many times I find it with some really impractical but way cute shoes at Nordstrom’s.

My husband understands this. We have a mutual respect for each other and our jobs within the family. I know

I can’t case a door and windows, install a dozen can lights, put up crown molding and baseboard in a day and make it look easy, and he knows he can’t go down to dusk catering to multiple and unending needs of two young children, from wiping butts to wiping tears and everything in between, without crying “Uncle.”

As mothers and fathers, we all have those days when parenting overwhelms us. When Supermom

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is reduced to a puddle of tears and Superdad has to admit, “I don’t know how you do this every day.” It’s not a sign of bad parenting or out-of-control kids. It’s a reality of raising a family. Some days the joys make your heart ache with happiness, and other days you have to call for backup.

And that’s where my husband comes in. Some days he is my savior at the other end of the hotline. He is nonjudgmental of the days when I do send the distress signal and appreciative of all the days I run our family with superhuman efficiency and organization. He is a true partner who even after his own long, hard day will say, “Don’t worry about it, honey. I’ve got it from here.”

Together raising our family, we make a great team, like Batman and Robin, Superman and Wonderwoman, or Mr. Incredible and Elastigirl. Although we do argue sometimes over who is the superhero and who is the sidekick.

But we all know the answer to that one, ladies.

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