

UNITED WISDOM

Support that makes autonomy possible

Relationships and Intimacy

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

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@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

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Epigraph

> *“I left the well-house eager to learn.”*

Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life*, Part I, Chapter IV, opening of the paragraph at web195. Keller’s own account of gaining access to language; no promise of identical learning outcomes for everyone.

What this article is about

Sometimes autonomy is offered as though receiving it first requires rejecting help. Work it out yourself, get there yourself, master the unfamiliar system yourself—and only then will the decision count as your own. Yet help can be the very condition that makes a choice available. An explanation opens up different options, accompaniment makes attending a meeting possible, a clear record preserves information that would otherwise remain in someone else’s memory. What matters here includes participation in deciding what is to be done, alongside the number of actions completed without another person.

This article considers support that expands available participation while remaining genuine interdependence. We distinguish purpose from execution, help from a test, and an opportunity to learn from an obligation to manage without support. Our fictional story concerns adult acquaintances; the historical sources retain their own worlds. Helen Keller’s narrative does not become a universal model of disability, Aristotle does not measure contemporary capacities, and Confucian instruction does not establish conditions for receiving necessary help. This is no clinical programme or legal judgment. It offers a question to ask of a particular arrangement: what can the person now choose, understand and change that they could not before? The answer allows some support to remain for a long time, with autonomy understood through participation rather than solitude.

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

I. Help can open up an action without replacing the person

Imagine a fictional scene. Darya wants to lead a small reading-club meeting. Her acquaintance Rimma knows how to organise such evenings and offers to prepare everything. She can quickly choose a subject, make a list, message the participants and allocate the time. The meeting will take place, but Darya’s wish to try a new role may remain outside that successful outcome. If Rimma first asks which part of participating matters to Darya, the help acquires a different subject. Perhaps what is needed is access to information about the venue and a chance to decide how the conversation will begin, rather than a finished evening. These are different offers, even when both look caring.

Support does not always have to become instruction. Someone may need precisely the finished result: there is no time to work things out today, the task is too demanding, or they simply do not want to acquire that skill. Such a decision can also be their own. But when participation is the purpose, doing everything for someone does not automatically meet it. It helps to clarify what the person wants to do, what they prefer to delegate and where they are still unsure. These distinctions require no assessment of character or appetite for development. They describe a particular action in particular circumstances and allow the helper to offer something relevant to the request.

Rimma has a choice too. She can explain how the meeting works without being available throughout the evening. Darya may prefer a smaller format requiring help only beforehand. Both then participate in setting the conditions. Neither declining full service nor asking to leave one difficult part with the helper establishes anyone’s inferiority. More relevant is whether the recipient can still determine the purpose and change the idea. If support is available only on complete agreement with the helper’s plan, an outcome becomes accessible, but a decision does not necessarily become so. This can be noticed without guessing at a hidden desire for control: describe which responses are actually accepted.

II. Access and capacity should not be confused

An uncompleted action does not by itself explain what is missing. Experience may be lacking, but so may information, time, a suitable way of communicating or access to a place. An appeal to show initiative does not supply those conditions. If only Rimma knows the meeting address, Darya cannot independently give it to participants. If the booking rules are unclear, asking her acquaintance does not prove an inability to organise an evening. First name the obstacle, then discuss suitable help. Otherwise a judgment of personality appears before a description of the task, and the person is asked to overcome something they cannot even clarify from the information available.

In Part I, Chapters III–IV of *The Story of My Life*, Helen Keller describes the search for means of communication and the start of learning with Anne Mansfield Sullivan. In the well-house episode, new understanding is connected to an action accessible to her: the sensation of water accompanies a word spelled into her hand. This is Keller's own retrospective narrative, rather than an experiment or instructions for today's reader. Relevant to our question is the distinction between an existing desire to express oneself and the means that make expression possible. The biography gives no right to declare all communication difficulties identical or prescribe a particular method.

The solution in our fictional club is much smaller: Rimma passes on the necessary contacts and explains which information has already been confirmed. They can then separately establish whether Darya wants to write the invitation. Changed conditions do not guarantee a successful evening or prove that every obstacle has disappeared. They allow the next step to be assessed more precisely. The person is responding to an accessible task, rather than a demand to show autonomy within a closed system. The helper also has less to guess: they can ask whether the information supplied is enough without making the question a test of gratitude. Sometimes a new means makes refusal possible, which also belongs to expanded choice.

III. One's own purpose can include another person's execution

Not every action has to be performed personally for someone to remain a participant. Darya can choose the subject and lead the discussion while Rimma contacts the venue owner. That does not make the evening exclusively someone else's. The question is whether participants distinguish the decision, its execution and agreed constraints. A person can understand what will be done, ask a question and reject a proposed option even when someone else performs part of the work. Autonomy here is not measured by the number of solitary steps. It takes a particular form: participation in determining the purpose and conditions that the person will subsequently encounter.

A counterexample matters. Darya declares the entire evening her own idea but wants to use Rimma's time and money without discussing them. Having a purpose does not create an unlimited right to someone else's execution. Support includes the helper's agreement, and sometimes conditions attached to a shared resource and previously accepted commitments. A smaller scope, another date or a different method can be proposed. If agreement proves impossible, the idea may not happen yet. That constraint is unpleasant, but more accurate than a promise that every recognised need must immediately receive an available resource. The recipient's dignity and the helper's real limits need simultaneous attention, without competing over whose right matters more in general.

Delegating execution also differs usefully from delegating one's voice. If Rimma calls at Darya's request, she can clarify organisational information without necessarily having

permission to promise any subject or date on her behalf. The assignment can be stated beforehand. Darya can choose from the available options after the call. This is an example of an editorial distinction about participation, rather than a universal legal agreement. In a complicated situation, powers and duties need their own specific examination. For ordinary support, it is worth at least avoiding the assumption that permission to perform one step automatically includes permission to complete the entire choice. Help remains more precise when its scope does not expand unnoticed for both people.

IV. Learning need not become a test of entitlement to help

In the *Analects*, VII.8 in James Legge's translation, the teacher expects the pupil actively to carry a thought further after part of it has been shown. This is a particular historical educational ideal connected to moral cultivation and the teacher's authority. It draws attention to the pupil's participation without establishing a contemporary rule for access to help. It does not justify concluding that someone who has failed to extend an explanation quickly enough no longer deserves necessary conditions. The comparison retains the difference between an educational expectation within a tradition and support for an adult whose task may not involve acquiring a new ability at all.

Rimma can invite Darya to try preparing the opening of the meeting, then discuss the difficult parts. That is learning with available feedback. A different situation arises if she first withholds information to see whether Darya can manage without her, then uses the difficulty as evidence of lacking autonomy. The method can be assessed through its conditions: was the experiment agreed, can it be stopped, and what consequences does an error have? We need not explain Rimma's conduct in advance through malicious intent. But the kind label of care cannot replace the participant's agreement to a test either. Support promised in one form should not quietly become an examination of something else.

Learning can include a pause, another explanation and a different task. An unsuccessful attempt tells us about that attempt, without defining the limits of an entire life. Darya may discover that she currently wants to lead only a short part of the evening. Rimma can say that the proposed way of accompanying her is inconvenient. Both benefit from discussing the next option through observable conditions rather than accusations of laziness or excessive protection. This makes no promise that patience alone will create a skill. It offers a narrower requirement for their arrangement: name learning as learning, agree its scope, and avoid making the right to request needed help a hidden reward for passing an examination.

V. Support need not disappear after the first success

In Keller’s narrative, obstacles remain after the new understanding of language. The episode’s own structure does not support a simple story in which one successful moment cancels further assistance. We derive no accompaniment programme from it; we note a limit of the metaphor of sudden liberation. In adult life, available choice can likewise depend on a lasting means or another person’s participation. A successful club meeting does not prove that Darya must now do everything alone. Help with an organisational contact can remain while she expands her independent leading of the conversation. Those changes concern different parts of a task and need not happen simultaneously.

A continuing need should be distinguished from an unchanging way of meeting it. A person may require an accessible information format for a long time while the particular helper or tool changes. Sometimes the familiar arrangement suits everyone, and changing it merely to fit an image of independence is unnecessary. Sometimes it is too vulnerable: without one person, an entire area becomes unavailable. The task then concerns finding an accessible way to continue, rather than issuing a moral demand to stop needing anything. Another contact or a clear record can make support more sustainable. Neither cancels the previous helper’s contribution or means that the relationship is now valued less.

Help should not suddenly be removed to test whether the recipient can already manage without it. If participants want to change its extent, they can discuss a particular part, a timeframe and a return to the former approach where genuinely possible. Not every transition is reversible, so that condition should not be promised without grounds. Darya can try managing invitations while retaining help with the venue. Rimma can state her unavailability beforehand. Actual needs for care, accessibility or other necessary conditions do not thereby become educational material for our fictional exercise. This article sets no procedure for withdrawing services and assesses no legal duties of particular people or institutions.

VI. The helper can leave room for a different approach

New autonomy need not reproduce the helper’s style. Rimma leads conversations quickly, likes a detailed plan and allocates every contribution beforehand. Darya may prefer fewer participants and a freer opening. The difference alone says nothing about whose approach is more mature. Particular conditions can be checked: is there enough time, do people know the subject, and who is responsible for the agreed finish? If conditions are met, a different style need not be corrected simply because it is unfamiliar. Help can then include information about consequences without requiring identical tastes. This lets the recipient avoid demonstrating autonomy through an artificial rejection of everything offered.

At the same time, the word choice cannot defend every difference. Darya may want to change an agreed date when others are already relying on it. Consequences of a joint action have arisen. The change and its cost can be discussed while retaining participants' right to respond. The helper can name a particular problem without declaring the other person's approach wrong in general. The recipient can acknowledge a problem without returning all authority over the idea to the helper. Such discussion does not guarantee agreement. It separates a genuinely shared condition from a personal habit and prevents one level quietly appropriating the other.

Sometimes remaining alongside an imperfect result that one could improve is difficult for a helper. This is a possible experience, rather than an established motive of Rimma's. If she recognises it, they can agree where Darya values her own attempt and where joint checking really is needed. Errors have different costs, and a safe discussion about a small club evening cannot be transferred to dangerous work. Support obliges no one to permit every error and excuses no humiliation in discussing one. Better to name an acceptable range for a particular action than create a general story that autonomy grows only through suffering or that care must prevent every difficulty.

VII. Gratitude does not transfer authority over the future

Rimma contributed a great deal to the first evening. Darya can acknowledge that contribution specifically: without the information received, she could not have organised the meeting in the chosen venue. Acknowledgment does not mean Rimma now chooses every subsequent subject. Help and later managerial authority are different relationships. If joint leadership was discussed, it has its own conditions. If the contribution was a gift, a later unwelcome decision by the recipient does not retrospectively turn it into an obligation of obedience. It matters both to preserve the value of what was received and to avoid accepting every future request merely to keep past recognition genuine.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, IX.9, Aristotle considers whether the happy and self-sufficient person needs friends, retaining their place in a good life. This is a philosophical argument within his account of virtue and activity. It is not equivalent to a contemporary entitlement to services or a study of assistance arrangements. For our subject, it helps that a developed life is not described exclusively through the absence of others. However, historical ideas of a worthy way of living should not become rankings of the value of people with different capacities. Our measure of participation in a decision remains a separate authorial proposal, rather than a translation of Aristotle's entire system.

A supportive relationship can continue after its previous role changes. Rimma and Darya can read together, meet outside the club or discuss the next evening as equal participants in a particular undertaking. This is a possibility, not an obligation to preserve every contact. A recipient need not guarantee the helper unchanged closeness in exchange for an opportunity

to develop. A helper need not endlessly maintain the former workload to demonstrate selflessness. Change and its associated experiences can be acknowledged without turning gratitude into a promise with no end. If conversation is unsafe, our fictional scene requires no engagement for the sake of a beautiful conclusion or a detailed explanation of one’s autonomy.

VIII. Available choice has a cost that needs to be visible

A formal possibility of refusal does not yet show which options are available. If Rimma alone knows the venue conditions, Darya can reject her plan, but the whole evening then becomes impossible. This arrangement did not necessarily arise deliberately. They can acknowledge that choice is narrowed and ask which information can actually be passed on. Speaking only of the recipient’s courage instead turns an access problem into a demand upon character. Support expands choice when it changes a particular condition or helps find a practicable option, rather than merely declaring someone free. Sometimes no such option is currently available, and that needs an honest name.

Different resources need not come together immediately. Darya has an idea but no time; Rimma has experience but no available evening; the venue is occupied. The event can be reduced or postponed if participants agree. This is no defeat of autonomy. A decision relates to conditions as well as desire. Elsewhere, the consequences of refusal are much more serious, and the club story should not be treated as a sufficient model. Our article establishes no services to which a person is entitled and does not replace specific inquiry into available possibilities. It helps avoid confusing limited access with a supposedly established inability to choose in any area.

Support especially should not become pressure upon safety, privacy or convictions. A demand to see every message for the sake of one organisational call goes beyond its ordinary subject. A threat to withdraw necessary assistance for disagreement also differs from an honest statement of real limits on participation. We diagnose no person from one sentence; we consider a condition and its consequences. Under threat, accessible safe resources can be sought first instead of performing a voluntary exercise in open conversation. No one has to take a risk to prove they can ask or thank someone precisely. Being able to keep some information private also belongs to participating in one’s own decision.

IX. An outcome can be examined through changed possibilities

The number of completed tasks is useful to observe, but it is not the only outcome of support. The evening happened, yet Darya still does not know how to contact the venue. Or the meeting was smaller than initially planned, but she can now arrange the next date herself. The second outcome cannot automatically be called better in every case: perhaps the person needed precisely a large evening. If, however, the agreed purpose concerned new participation, relevant information has appeared. Checking starts with the stated purpose. Autonomy need not be invented as a hidden criterion by which a recipient must assess every service, including those requested for entirely different reasons.

They can ask whether a particular choice is now accessible, whether the basis of a decision is clear and whether someone knows where to turn with a new difficulty. Darya need not provide an impressive report of personal growth. She can say that one step has become clearer, another is still too difficult and a third is unrelated to her intention. Such an answer does not exclude gratitude. It lets the method of helping be reconsidered using actual information. Rimma can also state the cost of participating: how much time was required and what will not be possible later. Assessment ceases to belong exclusively to the helper while still considering both sides of the arrangement.

Not every effect can be established after one episode. A calm evening proves no lasting skill, and a difficult conversation establishes no incapacity. Sometimes a small conclusion without a general forecast is enough: the contact was obtained, Darya chose the subject herself, and arranging the time still requires participation. Individual observations assist the next decision without needing the label of a successful transformation. A historical biography and a philosophical text support the question but do not measure our scene’s outcome. The practice remains an editorial proposal; a person assesses its use in their particular undertaking without having to match an inspiring story.

X. Autonomy can be a way of remaining connected

After several meetings Darya chooses the format herself while Rimma continues to help with one organisational part. They can consider this arrangement suitable even though complete independence has not appeared. What matters is that the recipient’s participation has become discernible: conditions are known, changes can be proposed and some decisions need no approval from her acquaintance. Support has neither disappeared nor become a defeat. Autonomy can thus be understood through accessible authorship of particular decisions. This understanding cancels no material constraints and makes no promise that every collaboration can be rearranged. It simply changes the question asked of existing help.

For the helper, the change may open another way of participating too. Rimma no longer has to be the sole organiser of every step. She can offer experience and discuss the chosen part while retaining her own limits. Yet less participation does not always immediately mean less work: explanation and information transfer require time. We therefore cannot promise that developing another person’s autonomy will necessarily make the helper’s life easier. A transition has a cost to discuss separately. Otherwise the recipient is hurried for a benefit attributed to them by the attractive word development, while the helper is promised a saving of effort that has not yet been established.

Support that makes autonomy possible is defined neither by a single kind intention nor by a single successful outcome. It can be considered through access, participation, limits and the possibility of revision. A person can understand more, choose more precisely and still need ongoing help. They can accept a finished result without wanting to learn that task. They can reject an unsuitable form while recognising the value of an earlier contribution. None of these possibilities resolves relationship difficulties by itself. But they allow particular cooperation without a demand first to earn the right to choose through a solitary feat. Other people remain part of an accessible life, rather than an obstacle that must necessarily be outgrown.

What this means in practice

If you wish, choose a small undertaking that can be discussed calmly. First name the purpose: obtaining a result, understanding an arrangement, making a decision or trying a particular part yourself. Avoid turning every request into a learning programme. Then identify the current obstacle: missing information, time, a clear method, a skill or an agreed resource. This describes conditions without drawing a conclusion about personality. The exercise can be declined when the question is too difficult or the required participation cannot safely be discussed.

Clarify the subject of help and the limits of the offer. Who chooses, who executes, and what must be agreed together? Select just one accessible step. In our story, it might be obtaining the venue contact rather than independently organising the whole evening. If continuing support is needed, do not plan its disappearance as an obligatory outcome. If the helper’s participation changes, state the transition’s real conditions without promising a replacement that has not been found. Necessary services, dangerous tasks and questions of authority require their own checking; this practice prescribes no withdrawal of help.

After the episode, note a particular change: an option appeared, a condition became clearer, an obstacle remained or the cost exceeded expectations. Recipient and helper may answer differently. Neither must be declared mature or dependent, and no hidden motive needs to be assigned. The former arrangement can remain, part can change, or the lack of a suitable solution can be acknowledged. The practice is voluntary, does not guarantee an outcome and

requires no unsafe contact. Its purpose is to see whether this support expands participation in a particular decision while preserving human dignity regardless of how much help may be needed later.

Key quotation

> *“There were barriers still...”*

Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life*, Part I, Chapter IV, web194, opening of the final sentence before the comma. Keller continues her narrative with a prospect of overcoming them; the brief fragment notes that new understanding did not instantly remove every obstacle.

Connections between traditions

Comparison	Shared question and limit
Keller ↔ authorial distinction about access	A means of communication expands participation. A particular biography is no universal assistance programme.
Aristotle ↔ autonomy in connection	A good life retains friends. His ideal of virtue does not measure contemporary accessibility.
Analects ↔ pupil participation	Explanation expects further thought. A historical educational demand establishes no entitlement to necessary help.
Keller ↔ Analects	Participation receives attention. Access to language and a teacher’s expectation differ in situation and authority.
Keller ↔ Aristotle	Others remain significant. Autobiography and normative philosophy form no single efficacy proof.

This is a limited map of three sources and an authorial question, without a common doctrine, clinical conclusion or requirement to relinquish support.

Sources

• Helen Keller. The Story of My Life. The work dates to 1903; displayed Special Edition with additional chapters, edited by John Albert Macy. Title information, editorial preface and Keller’s own Part I Chapters III–IV at web164–197 were read. Quotations come only from Keller’s own narrative; letters and other authors’ supplementary account are unused. The electronic version establishes no universal licence.

• Aristotle. The Nicomachean Ethics, IX.9. Accessed English text PG8438; the translator of this electronic version is not established by the checked information. The complete chapter at web1874–1899 and nearest context were read; a normative argument about friends and activity, rather than a study of contemporary support programmes. Paraphrase only, without borrowing embedded quotations.

• The Analects, VII.8. James Legge translation from the Chinese Classics, PG3330, this version's numbering. VII.1–10 at web172–187 and returned surroundings were read; the comparison about learning participation retains historical moral and role constraints. Paraphrase only, without importing raw source material.

Tags

support, autonomy, participation, choice, access, help, interdependence, dignity, conditions, purpose, execution, decision, learning, explanation, information, resource, limit, gratitude, privacy, safety, cooperation, revision, responsibility, experience, communication, Keller, Aristotle, Confucius, Analects, practice, United Wisdom

About the authors

Andrey Zarinsh is the author and founder of United Wisdom. He explores inner transformation, unity across traditions, intercultural dialogue and contemporary spiritual discipline. Instagram: @andrey.zarinsh

Maria Evilkut is a coauthor of United Wisdom. Alongside research, she seeks to test these ideas in practice and observe how unity and mutual understanding work in real life between people and cultures. Instagram: @ilkutki