



Hyper-Independence: When Not Needing Anyone Becomes a Problem

An explainer and receiving-support practice ladder · Created by Simar Gill Lowther, MACP, RP (CRPO)

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At a glance

- Independence is healthy. Hyper-independence is when relying on others feels unsafe or impossible.
- It often begins as protection, learned when needing others led to disappointment.
- Letting support in is a skill, and it can be practised in small steps.

What is hyper-independence?

Hyper-independence isn't a diagnosis. It's a pattern of doing everything yourself, even when it costs you. It can look like strength from the outside. Inside, it often feels lonely and exhausting.

It might sound like:

- "It's faster if I just do it myself."
- "I don't want to be a burden."
- "If I rely on people, they'll let me down."
- "I'm fine." (when you're not)
- Feeling uncomfortable, guilty, or suspicious when someone offers help

Where it comes from

Hyper-independence is usually an adaptation. It makes sense if you grew up needing to be the "responsible one," if caregivers were unavailable or unpredictable, if you experienced trauma or betrayal, or if you immigrated and had to build life from scratch. Some cultures and professions also reward never asking for help.

At one point, self-reliance protected you. The question now is whether it still serves you.

What the research says

Attachment research describes how early experiences shape whether we see closeness and reliance on others as safe. "Avoidant" patterns often involve strong self-reliance and discomfort with depending on others (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

A major meta-analysis of 148 studies found that strong social relationships were associated with a 50% greater likelihood of survival over time, an effect comparable to quitting smoking (Holt-Lunstad, Smith & Layton, 2010).

The hidden costs

Area	What can happen
Wellbeing	Burnout, chronic stress, feeling alone even around people
Relationships	Others may feel shut out, unneeded, or unsure how to get close
Work	Overload, difficulty delegating, resentment
Health	Delaying medical or emotional care until things become a crisis

Tool: My Receiving-Support Ladder

Start at the bottom rung. Practise each step a few times before moving up. Notice your feelings each time. Discomfort is normal, and it means you are stretching, not failing.

Run g	Practice step	What I noticed (feelings, thoughts)
6	Let someone help without redoing it yourself afterward.	
5	Ask for support with something that matters to you.	
4	Share one honest feeling with someone safe: "Today was hard."	
3	Ask for a small, practical favour (a recommendation, a ride).	
2	Accept a small offer of help (holding a door, carrying a bag).	
1	Say "thank you" to a compliment or kind act without minimizing it.	

A belief about asking for help I learned growing up:

One person I could practise with:

What would change if I let myself be supported a little more?

When to reach out for support

If letting people in feels frightening, or past hurt makes connection hard, therapy can be a safe place to practise. Often, the therapeutic relationship itself is where people first learn that relying on someone can be safe.

Insightful Journey Inc. offers therapy in person in Oshawa and virtually across Ontario, in English, Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu. Direct billing available.

[Book a free consultation](#) · 647-982-2527 (call, text, or WhatsApp)

In crisis? Call or text 9-8-8, or call 911.

This resource is for education and self-reflection. It is not a diagnostic tool and is not a substitute for professional assessment or care.

References

Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., & Layton, J. B. (2010). Social relationships and mortality risk: A meta-analytic review. *PLoS Medicine*, 7(7), e1000316.

Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2016). *Attachment in adulthood: Structure, dynamics, and change* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.

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