

# TAKING TIME

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### Finding Help For New Beginnings

The March winds are finally ushering in a hint of spring. The spring season often inspires the search for new beginnings. Many people long for renewal, for the opportunity to begin again or make changes in their lives, but often they don't know where to go to find help with the process. Being able to find help when you need it is a valuable skill.

Several months ago, I was able to link a friend to a vital health service. Her mother-in-law had been diagnosed with terminal cancer, and I put her in touch with the local hospice services. Last month a single mom in one of my parenting groups desperately needed support from others, and I linked her to some group meetings for herself and her young daughter.

Connecting people to assistance is an important task. Many people really don't know where to go for help and information. They are unaware of community systems designed to do the connecting. Information and referral organizations keep directories of community services and resources. In the Lehigh Valley, Valley Wide Help - a division of the American Red Cross - helps put people in touch with needed support. Another option open to employees of larger companies is the corporate Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Many industries and corporations provide a counseling service for their employees. In most cases, assistance for employees' family members is also included in this benefit. EAP counselors don't only provide access to therapy, they can also help families adjust to relocation,

deal with stresses related to work overload, and guide a teen who is having difficulties in school.

Knowing where to go for help is a challenge. Phone directories list many vital human service support numbers in the blue pages. Families should familiarize themselves with the range of help available. The key to new beginnings is seeking help. If you are struggling with decisions, need greater information, or need a shoulder to cry on, let others know. "Helping professionals" - counselors, clergy, social workers, physicians - can link you to the support you need. Even neighbors may have experience of information to share. Ask.

If you receive a call for help, here are a few ways to be supportive:

- Be available for a long talk.
- Offer an arm on a troubled shoulder.
- Buy groceries.
- Stop by and put the kids to bed (offer to read a story or sing with them).
- Drive with the friend to the hospital.
- Take a walk together.
- As a helper, avoid providing false assurances. Often people want to be heard. Issuing a quick "everything will be okay" may actually be a disservice, making

an adult feel weak. It is appropriate to communicate your faith in the person. Share your commitment to walk with them through the change. Blaming others for the situation is also unhelpful. Most importantly, each helper should know his or her limitations. Serious problems need professional and experienced attention. If you

become involved with someone who you think may need more help than you can provide, you can become the connecting link.

Putting people in touch with supportive services and information in a time of need may be just the lift they need to begin a new phase of their lives. What a wonderful salute to spring.

## E. Coli Under The Microscope

LEESPORT (Berks Co.) — The dangers of E. coli O157:H7 were magnified this past winter when outbreaks in Washington State and elsewhere around the country were attributed to this rare but extremely virulent bacteria. Since 1982, E. coli has been responsible for at least 16 major U.S. food-borne outbreaks and 22 deaths. Young children, the elderly and immune-compromised individuals are at particular risk.

E. coli is found in the intestinal tract of both animals and man, and can be transmitted by numerous routes: from animal to animal, animal to man, animal to man on food, and person to person through close contact. Unlike other bacteria, it can survive re-

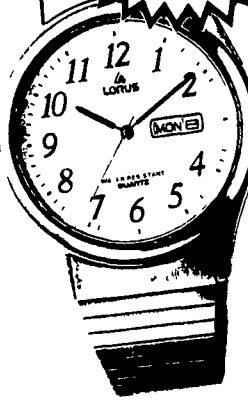
frigeration and freezing.

Although undercooked ground beef represents one of the greatest risks of E. coli due to its handling and preparation, outbreaks also have been traced to undercooked roast beef, raw milk, improperly processed cider, contaminated water and mayonnaise, and vegetables grown in cow manure. The best defense against E. coli is thorough cooking.

According to FIND/SVP, a marketing research firm based in New York, total retail sales of packaged frozen yogurt were \$742 million in 1991. Still, an estimated 30 percent of the U.S. population hasn't even tried frozen yogurt.

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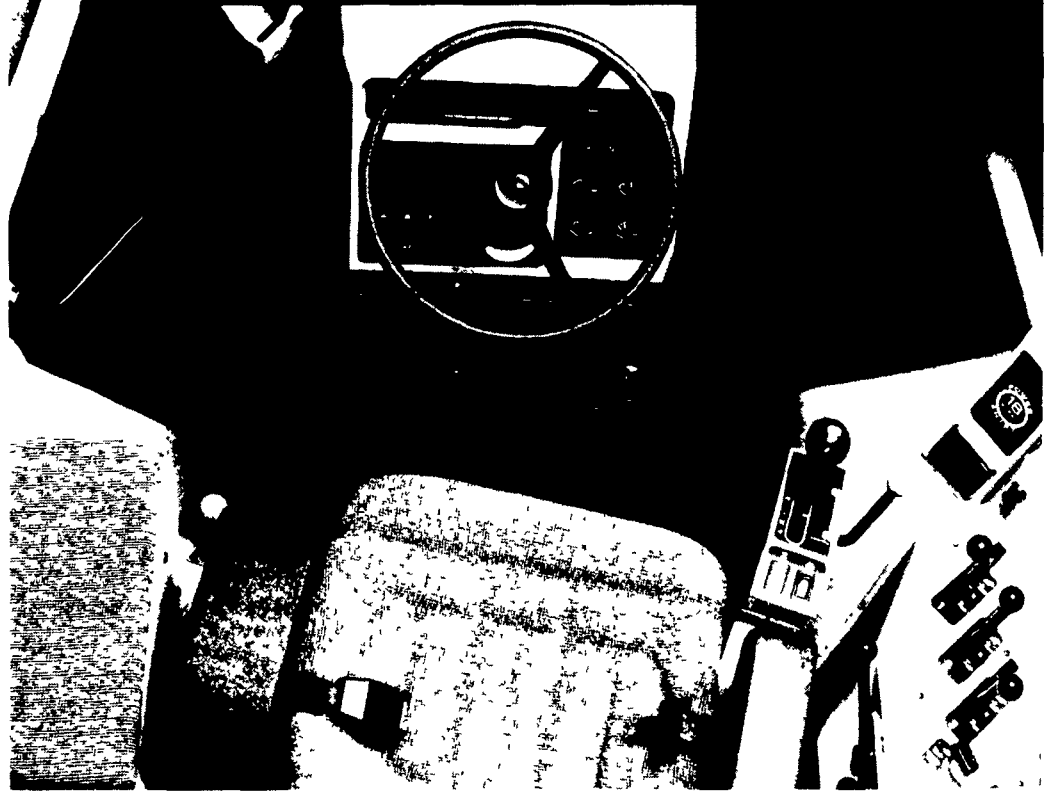
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