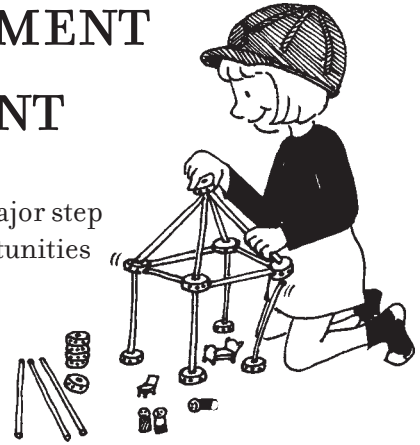


TURNING DISCOURAGEMENT INTO ENCOURAGEMENT

Avoiding the tendency to discourage our children is a major step in the right direction. The next step is to look for opportunities to actively encourage them. We can use the power of encouragement in general ways to build a bedrock of courage and self-esteem, and we can use it in specific ways to encourage positive behavior, values, and attitudes.



Instead of...

focusing on mistakes—————> build on strengths
expecting too much—perfectionism—> show acceptance
negative expectations—————> show confidence
expecting too little—overprotection—> stimulate independence

Build on Strengths

Our successes bolster our courage and motivate us to want to do even better. The same is true for our children. Helping them experience the joy of achievement and then commenting on the strengths they called upon to make achievement happen is a wonderful way to encourage further progress.

1. Focus your encouragement on the behavior rather than the child.

Parents sometimes ask what is wrong with telling a child that she is a “good girl,” or otherwise praising her personality. Children experience such praise as a double-edged sword: “I am a ‘good’ girl when I do what you want; therefore, I must be a ‘bad’ girl when I don’t.”

2. Comment on the effort, not just the results.

NO: Not saying anything until the report card arrives.

YES: Giving encouragement throughout the year: “You are really working hard on your reading. I can hear the improvement.”

3. Break large tasks into smaller steps.

NO: “Let’s organize your room today.”

YES: “Let’s organize your closet today.”

Later: “You did a great job with the closet! Doesn’t it look terrific? How about making a date to tackle the bookshelf next?”

4. Look for past examples of strengths to encourage your child to take the next step.

NO: "I know you can do this report."

YES: "You did a good job writing that paper on Eleanor Roosevelt. I know this report is a little longer, but I'll bet if you break it down into sections, you'll do a fine job."

Show Acceptance

Parents who are achievers sometimes unwittingly send the message that they accept their children *as long as they perform to their parents' standards*. Because all children have a fundamental need to belong, to feel accepted and wanted—especially by their parents—any suspicion that Mom's or Dad's acceptance is conditional undermines children's sense of security, self-esteem, and courage. We must let our children know through our words and actions that we love and value them for themselves—just because they are our children. Our acceptance is free and unconditional. Sure, we want to encourage their success, and we do not accept certain behavior as okay, but we always accept them as unique and special human beings who are gifts in our lives.

"I really enjoy being with you."

"I can tell it's you from hearing that great laugh of yours."

"I know you're disappointed in not making the team, but you tried your best, and that's what's important."

"I'm glad you are my daughter."

Show Confidence

All children can learn, even though some may take longer than others to master a concept or a skill. Your confidence in your child's ability to keep going when he feels frustration and defeat, your confidence that he will eventually succeed, your confidence that he will make something useful of his life—this is the encouragement that can make the difference between success and failure.



To show confidence, you really have to believe that your child is capable of success. If you don't believe in her, then she has to overcome your doubts as well as her own. That's an uphill battle. Some tips:

1. Keep your confidence in line with reality. Just as it's silly to have confidence that you'll win the lottery, you don't want to set up false or unrealistic expectations by showing confidence that your child will make all As when he has been struggling to pass.

NO: "I know you're failing this course, but I believe you can get an A if you really try."

YES: "I know you can pass this course if you give it the same effort you give your rollerblading."

2. Show confidence by giving responsibility. Allowing children to take on additional responsibilities is an excellent way to communicate your confidence. Keep the level of responsibility in line with their age and ability to handle it, then look for opportunities to encourage their efforts.



"We can get a pet hamster if you will feed it and clean out the cage."

"I think you are old enough to help me with some of the house chores. Would you rather start by learning how to use the vacuum cleaner or the furniture polish?"

3. Ask your child's opinion. This communicates that you have confidence in her ability to think.

"You've been studying about World War II. Do you think that was a war worth fighting?"

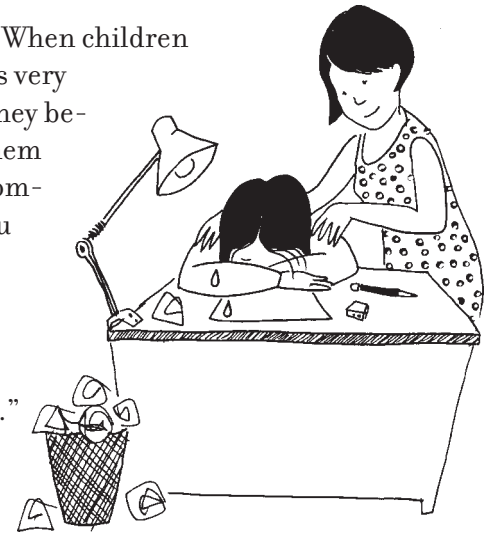
"Where do you think we should go on our picnic? The park or the nature center?"

4. Don't rescue your children from frustration. When children have difficulty with a task that we can easily do, it is very tempting to step in and take over. Instead, when they become frustrated, try offering partial help and let them still take part of the credit. If you think they can complete the task by themselves if they keep trying, you might simply offer encouragement.

"You can do it. Keep at it."

"Come on, just a little more and you'll have it."

"Here, let me help you pull the bow through. Now you pull it tight. Great!"



Stimulate Independence

As children learn to do more and more for themselves, they become more confident, take on new challenges, learn more, and continue to succeed. By stimulating our children's independence, we can help them grow into mature, responsible adults.

"Now that we've gone over the steps in order, I think you can do this project on your own. I'm looking forward to seeing it when you're finished."

"From now on I'd like each of us to make his own bed before coming down for breakfast."

More Encouragement Tips

As you look for ways to encourage each of your children, keep in mind that what one child finds encouraging, another may find discouraging. Observe what words or actions each of your children best responds to. Make sure that you:

- **Make the encouragement immediate.** The sooner your encouragement follows the attitude or behavior you approve, the more powerful it is.
- **Make the encouragement genuine.** If you tell your child she is doing well when she knows she isn't, your credibility isn't worth much. Future encouragement may be doubted, even when it's sincere.
- **Make the encouragement specific.** Specific positive feedback tells your children what to keep doing in the future. This promotes both motivation and improvement: "I like the way you used gray in the sky. It makes the castle look more gloomy."

What Encouragement Sounds Like

You can use hundreds of words and phrases to actively encourage your children. Find the ones that suit your style and please your children's ears. Here are some ideas:

attagirl
nice job
now you're getting it

super
attaboy
I appreciate it
you did it

bingo
that's the way
you really earned it
wow!

try again, you can do it

awesome
I really like that

great

neat
amazing

you got it
superb

now you're cooking

I'm proud of you

good for you

good effort

how special!

way to go

you can do it

terrific

cool

thanks

you made it

wonderful

keep it up

you must feel proud

gimme five

nice try

very good

