



The Enjoyable Art of EnCOURAGEment

How we speak to children influences how they think about themselves. Many well-meaning parents use praise and say, "I'm so proud of you." Praise is problematic. It is reserved for success only; focused on the doer, not the deed; and judgmental. Learning the enjoyable art of encouragement can transform how you communicate with your child and contribute to your child's self-esteem.

Courage is the root of **encouragement**. We most need courage after a setback, disappointment or failure. Encouragement gives children the courage to try again. As painful as mistakes and bad decisions can be, it is by working through them that we develop character, stalwartness and the ability to keep going.

Here's a challenge: Observe yourself and your family like actors for a week. Do you use praise? What is your child's response? How do you feel when you give praise?

Start practicing encouragement on yourself and your family. Evaluate a half-done craft project, an

assignment that wasn't as good as you expected, or a task that needed improvement. Instead of criticizing the mistakes, evaluate the effort with fresh eyes. Look at what was done well, how far they got, and what was accomplished, even if imperfect. Encouragement plants the seed to try again, especially after failure.

Meg, 15, showed Mom a half-knitted skinny irregular scarf in earth tones. Mom would never wear the scarf. Mom asked questions, a form of encouragement because it shows interest. "How long did it take you to get this far? Who is it for? How did you choose the color scheme and pattern?" Then Mom noticed specific attributes of the scarf. "The wool is super-soft." "You're learning to make the stitches even."

If you have a difficult relationship with a child or teen, start a daily practice of noticing one positive thing or deed done by the child every day. Get the habit of giving daily compliments. "Nice shirt." "You worked hard on that." "Tell me about it." "That was a creative way to solve that problem."

Encouragement will transform a difficult relationship with a child or teen by focusing on success, effort, and what has worked. Encouragement plants the seed to try again. Children need encouragement like a flower needs water to keep blooming.

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Encouragement:

- Is specific, versus praise, which is general;
- Focuses on the task and behavior, not a parent's reaction to it;
- Notices effort during the process, such as starting or taking steps towards a larger goal. Praise rewards perfection and accomplishment only at the end;
- Plants the seed to try again after failure. Praise ignores effort and failure;
- Requires that someone take a close look and appreciate the effort involved. Praise requires little thought or involvement;
- Focuses on the doer and what the task, effort or achievement means to the doer. Praise reflects on the authority figure.