

Praise with a Purpose

Encouraging Children to Succeed



Whether on television, in the newspaper, or on the Internet, some days it seems as if bad news is the only news. Upbeat and inspiring stories can be rare. Over time, gloomy headlines can have a discouraging effect on us all, but particularly on our children. In addition, advertising and marketing directed toward children can leave them feeling inadequate if they do not have the products being sold. Similar to the news media, parents often find it easier to give negative, rather than positive, feedback to their children. But children thrive on positive attention. They need to feel loved and appreciated.

Fatherhood can be more enjoyable when you have a positive relationship with your children. They will pay more attention to you and will try harder to please you. Good communication is important for constructing positive relationships. The frequent use of encouraging words can make communication more productive with all children, from toddlers to teenagers. Consistently communicating encouraging words to your children will give them the approval and acceptance they are looking for and help them develop healthy confidence and self-esteem.

Reaching out to children needs to be from the heart and meaningful. Let your children know you are involved with and interested in their lives. Avoid fake flattery and use words and phrases that remind them of their uniqueness and point out their strengths. Some of the shortest sentences can have the longest lasting positive impact on your relationship with your children: "Good job." "Nice work." "That's the way." "What a great idea." "I'm so proud of you." "I'm glad you're my son/daughter." "I love you."

Everyday phrases of encouragement, love, and acceptance have a more long-term influence on your children than big parties or special events. Think of daily encouraging words like those small handmade cardboard signs that direct people to neighborhood yard sales. Despite their plain looks, these subtle and well-placed reminders have as much drawing power as a large neon sign might. Similarly, small yet consistent expressions of encouragement can draw your children closer to you than a one-time lavish gift.

Many dads, however, are men of few words. Some of us are uncomfortable speaking lovingly to our children to intentionally encourage them every day. Fortunately, words are not the only way to let children know we appreciate their efforts and improvement, not just their accomplishments.

In addition to telling your children how you feel, you can show them. Gestures such as a hug, smile, nod, pat on the shoulder or back, wink, or high five often can say more than words to motivate your children. Surprise your children with some kind of positive contact every day.

Your body language can reflect your encouragement. Laugh with your children—never at them—often. The expression on your face and in your eyes also can reinforce positive messages. Be careful to avoid sighs or other expressions of frustration when communicating with your children. Children notice these signs and take them to heart.

You also can take advantage of technology to communicate encouragement to your children. Send a text

message or e-mail with some quick positive feedback about something they did that day:

- “I like the way you ____.”
- “I appreciate how you ____.”
- “You’re great at ____.”

Tell them about a song or song lyrics that reminded you about them today. Why not actually sing the song in a voice mail message they can save and replay at times when your encouraging words can be a comfort. And in today’s digital world, a greeting card sent by traditional mail can be a wonderful and surprising way to catch children’s attention with encouraging words.

Some fathers, especially those who did not receive encouragement during their own childhoods, find it difficult to understand how important encouragement is for building self-confidence and feelings of worth in young people. In a recent interview, popular country music singer Rodney Atkins, who as an infant was finally adopted after being returned to the orphanage by two different couples because he was so sickly, summed up the impact of encouraging words from a father to his children: “A family has a way of healing you.”

For Further Discussion

- When you were a child or teenager, did you spend much time each day watching TV or listening to the radio? What about your children? Do they spend a lot of time in front of the TV or surfing the Internet? What activities might your children do alone or together with you that will help decrease the influence of media on their lives?
- Check out the current top 10 songs in any genre of music—rap, country, hip-hop, pop, or rock. How many of those songs have negative messages or present unrealistic relationships?
- Describe some additional ways you can express encouragement to your children. Over the next month, see how many different ways you can give your children positive feedback and support. On a calendar or in a day planner, record what you did each day and your children’s reactions.
- Where do you find encouraging words in your life? How often do you receive them? How might you increase the instances in which you receive encouraging words?

Check your local public library for these recommended titles:

BOOKS

- Fatherhood** by Bill Cosby
- The Five Love Languages of Children** by Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell
- Whose Kids Are These Anyway?** by Ken Swarner
- Daughters & Dads: Building a Lasting Relationship** by Chap Clark and Dee Clark
- The 7 Secrets of Effective Fathers** by Ken R. Canfield
- Girls!** by William and Kathryn Beausay
- How to Really Love Your Angry Child** by Ross Campbell, M.D.

MOVIES

- Monsters, Inc.**
- The Santa Clause**
- Madagascar**
- The Shaggy Dog**
- The Pacifier**
- Peter Pan**
- Lilo & Stitch**

For Further Discussion (cont.)

Group Work

Over the next week and month, pay close attention to television commercials. Jot down the names of products and companies whose commercials try to make consumers feel inadequate or incomplete without the product. Look at a variety of channels, at various times of day, but especially during children's programming. Share your findings with the group.

Over the next week and month, look at newspapers and magazines. Count and total the number of articles that discuss positive acts and the number of articles that cover negative news. Compare the two totals.

At Home

Identify at least 10 healthy character traits in your child. Here are some you might look for:

Grateful	Faithful	Compassionate	Thoughtful
Responsible	Joyful	Kind	Helpful
Teachable	Patient	Generous	Passionate
Wise	Gentle	Empathetic	Hopeful
Pure	Trustworthy	Honorable	Self-disciplined
Selfless	Honest	Dependable	Merciful
Forgiving	Courageous	Enduring	

Begin to watch for instances when your child uses or demonstrates the character traits. Offer words of praise to your child each time you see or hear the trait in action. For example, if being kind is one of the character traits you identified, you might say, "I heard what you said to your friend when he got hurt. That was a really kind thing to say. I'm sure it made him feel better."

Praising your child consistently and genuinely, referring to the use of these positive character traits, will strengthen your child's self-esteem and have a lifelong positive impact.

Take Time to Be a Dad Today



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
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www.fatherhood.gov
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