

Encouraging Words



Encouragement can help children feel good about themselves and develop self-confidence. Praise can be overdone and cause children to be overly dependent on adult approval. Helpful words show appreciation and excitement without sounding like empty praise. Encouraging words invite children to recognize that they are responsible for their efforts. Here are some tips on encouraging your child.

Notice specific good acts and comment on them.

- *Tell your child you love her and appreciate her efforts.* Provide her with encouragement about specific actions and skills. Instead of saying, “What a good girl you are,” try saying, “You put your book back on the shelf.” She will see her action as helpful.
- *Pay attention to the things that your child gets right.* For example, if he usually pushes to the front of the line but remembers to wait this time, you might say, “I’m glad you remembered to wait to go down the slide when you saw Jason get to the ladder first,” along with a smile or a hug.
- *Use words to help your child become aware of her own approach to problems.* “I noticed Maria wanted to play a different game than you did, so you suggested playing her choice and then playing yours. You looked like you were having fun together.”

Notice your child’s effort and give feedback.

- *Support your child’s good intentions.* Rather than saying, “What a beautiful card! You’re a great artist!” try saying, “Daddy will really like the get well card you made.”
- *Invite your child to talk about her efforts.* “You spent a lot of time working on Daddy’s card. Would you tell me about it?”
- *Give nonverbal feedback.* A smile, a wink, or a high-five tells your child that you noticed his efforts.

Avoid compliments that insult your child or others.

- *Use supportive and encouraging statements.* Saying, “You actually remembered to put your coat away for once” is not encouraging. Say, “Thank you for putting your coat away.”
- *Avoid insulting others while encouraging a child.* Saying, “You are a much better helper than your brother” may cause competition and resentment. Say, “How kind of you to carry grandma’s bag for her.”

Encouragement is nonjudgmental.

- *Encouraging words point out specific facts but are not evaluative.* “You used a lot of blue paint to cover the sky in your painting.”
- *Encouraging words build on a child’s inner drive to learn.* Your child learns that his self-motivation leads to new skills. Say, “Watching you practice zipping your coat tells me you are excited to learn how to zip.”

Children and adults feel good when statements are sincerely spoken: “I love you.” “I enjoy your silly jokes.” “I’m so glad you’re my child.”

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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