



Encouraging Encouragement

Your four-year-old just finished making a birthday card for Dad that took approximately 10 seconds before the crayons were back in the box. You took a look and felt a little disappointed, but still said something like, "Great job!" Kids can see through this type of positive feedback in an instant--they know they didn't give it their best shot. But even the most well-intentioned parent sprinkles words of praise throughout the day without thinking about it. We praise children in an effort to build self-confidence and a can-do attitude. Positive feedback is critical, but how are the messages we send interpreted by children? Research shows that praise and encouragement are different and that children benefit the most from encouragement.

The benefits of encouragement:

- Encouragement is specific to a behavior: "You fed the dog without being asked--great!" Praise is often more general: "Good job!"
- Encouragement is a commentary on effort or process rather than on the finished product. Instead of "I like your painting," we might say, "You worked so hard on your picture and you used so many colors."
- Encouragement uses fewer evaluative words such as "good" and "beautiful," placing more emphasis on how the child might feel about a behavior or a project rather than on how we feel. Praise can make children want to please adults rather than want to do their best work.

Encouragement is at the heart of positive messages. Researcher and

professor Carol Dweck, PhD, found that when children were praised for the tasks they accomplished, they chose easier tasks in the future because they wanted to avoid making a mistake. She found that children who were encouraged for their efforts on a task chose more difficult tasks when they were next given a choice. It seems that children who are praised too often have more anxiety about doing well all of the time, instead of focusing on the process of trying and attempting new things.

Encouragement focuses on what the child is doing well rather than on what the adult thinks about the child's work.

"I see that you're taking plenty of time making the butterfly more colorful" is an encouraging message, while "I like your beautiful butterfly" is a praise message. Adding a "thank you" or "I appreciate that" to an encouragement message can help guide the child toward desired behavior without the behavior being labeled "good." "You shared your toys with your friends--thank you" is an encouraging message that helps children be motivated to cooperate with others. It's



Encouragement:

- * Is sincere (not overdone)
- * Is specific and descriptive
- * Focuses on the process rather than evaluation of the final product
- * Helps children appreciate their own behaviors and achievements
- * Accepts there are different ways to do things

tempting to fill conversations with stock phrases such as "good girl!" or "good boy." The problem is, these phrases are general in nature and don't provide the child with information about what he's being praised for. This type of praise leads children to please adults rather than recognize their own feelings about what they've accomplished. Encouragement teaches children that they can still learn and improve, whereas praise leads to a belief that they have already mastered the task or that it's important to "look" talented or smart.

By taking just a moment to send encouraging messages, we're optimizing our children's potential. It will help them do their best and be proud of their individual accomplishments. We can then, of course, give ourselves a healthy dose of encouragement, too!

PERSONAL PARENTING

"Junk" Sculpture

Sculpture is all around us. It may be in the neighborhood park, at the library or museum, or in our backyard garden. Sculpture is three-dimensional--it has height, width, and depth. Children can build sculptures from all sorts of things, from LEGOS to clay, but they can also create interesting sculptures from common household items.

For this activity children will need:

- * Shoebox lids (a base for the sculpture)
- * Glue
- * Tape
- * A variety of household items:
 - Discarded CDs, Straws, Shoelaces, Craft sticks
 - Empty paper towel and wrapping paper rolls
 - Old toy parts, Bottle caps, Empty thread spools
 - Fabric and ribbon scraps, Pipe cleaners

Remind children that some objects must be held for a moment to fix them in place or else they'll topple down.



Shhh ... Quiet Time: A Healthy Habit

Everyone can benefit from a little peace and quiet. Even if kids no longer nap, they can learn to appreciate a quiet time every day. Many children get so wound up they can't stop (or "get off the treadmill," so to speak). But once the stimulation ends, they can quiet down and may even fall asleep.

Set a good example for children by refreshing yourself with quiet time, too.

Shhh ... Quiet Time Shhh ... Shhh ... Shhh ... Shhh



Easy Chicken Noodle Soup

This soup takes 10 minutes to prepare and 15 minutes to cook.

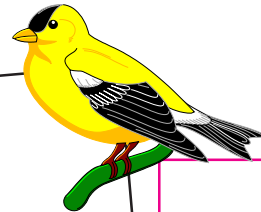
The best part is kids will eat it!

- 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 3 stalks celery, diced
- 3/4 cup diced carrots
- 2 Tbsp. minced garlic
- 6 cups water
- 2 packages chicken-flavored Ramen noodles
- 1 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- 1 1/2 cups diced cooked rotisserie chicken

Heat the oil in a heavy saucepan over medium heat. Add the onion, celery, carrots, and garlic. Cook, stirring for 3 to 4 minutes, or until the vegetables are soft. Add the water, seasoning packets from the noodles, and pepper. Turn the heat down to medium-low, and let the soup simmer for 3 to 5 minutes or until the carrots are fork tender. Add the chicken. Break up the noodles into bite-size pieces and add to the soup.

Cook for 5 more minutes.

Ice-Cream Cone Bird Feeder

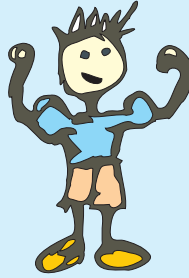


1. Poke holes on opposite sides of a small ice-cream cone just below the rim.
2. Thread string or yarn through the holes.
3. Place birdseed on a cookie sheet, spread apple or almond butter on the cone, then roll it in the birdseed.
4. Tie the bird feeder on the branch of a tree.
5. Enjoy the show!

Tips for Finding Time

- Learn to say no to others and yes to yourself.
- Help your kids to help themselves.
- Written words are useful: Jot down notes and put dates on your calendar.
- When someone else can do it, delegate it.
- Ask yourself, "What's the worst that can happen if I don't do this?"

Busy Bodies Build Brain



Power

Everyone knows that exercise keeps our bodies trim and fit, but the latest brain research shows that exercise benefits the brain, too. It improves problem solving, creativity, short-term memory, and even reaction time. With that in mind, parents may be even more motivated to move children away from TVs and computers and strap on their sneakers for some hopping, jumping, and skipping.

Cross-Lateral Movement

The left side of the brain controls the right side of the body, and the right side of the brain controls the left side of the body. It's been known for some time that getting both sides of the brain to communicate with each other dramatically increases learning. Interestingly, many childhood games encourage movements that require the arms and legs to cross from one side of the body to the other. Many games can be restructured to include arm and leg crossovers where the arms and legs cross the midline of children's vision.

- Put on some music and give children a scarf for each hand. Show them how to wave the scarves across their bodies.
- Play some old-fashioned games that require cross-lateral movements: "The Itsy Bitsy Spider." Use the right hand to crawl up the left arm when singing this song. Hot Cross Buns. Ask children to stand facing each other and touch their right hand to their partner's left hand in this fun and fast clapping game.
- Ask children to give themselves a big hug by reaching their right hand to their left shoulder and their left hand to their right shoulder.
- Let children paint with finger paint with one hand crossing over the other.
- Ask children to help you wash windows.
- Exercise or dance doing arm and leg crossovers.
- Let children walk on a balance beam or a piece of tape placed on the floor.

Exercise and the Brain

Exercise benefits the brain. Researchers have found that "those who are more fit tend to have a bigger hippocampus and perform better on a test of memory than their less-fit peers." Science Daily (Sep. 16, 2010)

The hippocampus is known to be important in learning and memory, spatial reasoning, and other cognitive tasks. Previous studies in older adults and in animals have shown that exercise can increase the size of the hippocampus. An exciting outdoor space for spinning, balancing, and climbing spells fun for children. Physical activities don't have to be organized--in fact, research shows that for movement experiences to reap the most benefit, they should be fun and present new challenges as children develop.

Pam Schiller, in her book *Start Smart: Building Brain Power in the Early Years*, states: "People who exercise regularly have improved short-term memory and exhibit faster reaction time. Exercisers also demonstrate higher levels of creativity than non-exercisers."

As humans, we learn in sequence. Babies and toddlers first learn to walk on level surfaces and progress to inclines and ramps. They learn to crawl up stairs before they learn to walk up them. Preschoolers run, jump, and skip. School-agers can kick and bat balls, and ride bicycles and scooters. When children see stone walls and other structures that provide a chance for balancing, they grab an adult's hand and start walking one foot in front of the other. Eventually, they can do it all by themselves. This activity builds balance and depth perception, and balance is the foundation for other skills such as climbing, jumping, and running.

Parents are key in providing the opportunities--children can take care of the rest, all the while boosting brain power to optimize life experiences.

