

## The Special Language of Encouragement

When comments about children's efforts are in order, we must be very careful not to place value judgments on what they have done. Too often, we make positive comments in a praising manner. Such comments express our values and opinions, rather than help children believe in themselves.

Be alert to eliminate value-loaded words from your vocabulary at these moments (for example, good, great, excellent, etc.). Substitute words of praise with phrases which express the special meaning of encouragement:

### Phrases that demonstrate acceptance:

- "I like the way you handled that."
- "I like the way you tackle a problem."
- "I'm glad you enjoy learning."
- "I'm glad you're pleased with it."
- "Since you're not satisfied, what do you think you can do so that you will be pleased with it?"
- "It looks as if you enjoyed that."
- "How do you feel about it?"

### Phrases that show confidence:

- "Knowing you, I'm sure you'll do fine."
- "You'll make it!"
- "I have confidence in your judgment."
- "That's a rough one, but I'm sure you'll work it out."
- "You'll figure it out."

### Phrases that focus on contribution, assets, and appreciation:

- "Thanks; that helped a lot."
- "It was thoughtful of you to \_\_\_\_\_."
- "Thanks, I really appreciate \_\_\_\_\_ because it makes my job much easier."
- "I need your help on \_\_\_\_\_."
- To a family group: "I really enjoyed today. Thanks."
- "You have skill in \_\_\_\_\_. Would you do that for the family?"

### Phrases that recognize effort and improvement:

- "It looks as if you really worked hard on that."
- "It looks as if you spent a lot of time thinking that through."
- "I see that you're moving along."
- "Look at the progress you've made."  
(be specific; tell how)
- "You're improving in..." (be specific)
- "You may not feel that you've reached your goal, but look how far you've come!"

### A Word of Caution:

Encouraging words can become discouraging if motivated by a parent's desire to establish "good" behavior permanently or by an "I told you so" attitude. Avoid giving with one hand and taking away with the other; that is, avoid qualifying or moralizing comments.

### For example:

"It looks as if you really worked hard on that;  
... so, why not do that all the time?"  
... it's about time,"  
... see what you can do when you try!"

### In summary, encouragement is:

- Valuing and accepting children as they are (not putting conditions on acceptance).
- Pointing out the positive aspects of behavior.
- Showing faith in children so that they can come to believe in themselves.
- Recognizing effort and improvement (rather than requiring achievement).
- Showing appreciation for contributions.

## ENCOURAGEMENT PRACTICE

\*Your child helped you fill the dishwasher after dinner.

"Your child is struggling with science homework.

\*Your child presents you his/her report card with a big grin.

\*A student began the class work correctly but did not follow the directions and did most of the assignment incorrectly. He/she needs to redo it.

\*You are waiting for the class to quiet down so you can begin your lesson.

\* A child says "This is boring!"