

Discouragement

Encouragement is a little spice that all of us can use more of in our lives. Most of us have experienced a bit of encouragement along the way and we can testify to its power.

Supportive words can cause us to feel more confident in ourselves and give us the boost of energy we need to keep going. By the same token, most of us have experienced discouragement. More often than not it comes from a person who is trying to be helpful or to share their experiences. But the end effect is that we feel less confident, we doubt our abilities, and we may even give up.

"Courage" is at the heart of "encouragement" and "discouragement". "Encouragement" provides a dose of "courage" while "discouragement" takes the courage away. As parents, we walk a fine line between the need to allow growth...and mistakes...and yet provide protection. Unfortunately, our tendency to "protect" can often lead to using discouraging language with our children—especially our teenagers: "I don't think you can do that", "Don't be disappointed if you fail to make the team", "You're not really good at that". Some of us use this language as a means to impart our own knowledge and experience, while others of us are simply trying to "protect" our children from feeling hurt. After all, we've been there and we know first-hand how difficult life can be when you are a teen. But our comments can have discouraging effects on our children. Many will give up before even trying, convinced that they will fail.

So, how do you find a balance between encouraging while having your child aware of dangers and pitfalls? First of all, become aware of encouraging and discouraging words.

During the coming week, make a point of listening to comments you make to others and that they make to you. Listen for and note the times that you hear encouragement and discouragement. Experiment with sharing a new idea or some goal that you are trying to accomplish. But be prepared---more often than not, you will be told what isn't right about the idea or goal, how it can't work, how you'll never be able to do it, how others couldn't do it, etc. Through awareness of the language we and others use, we can modify our own words.

Next, move into the habit of engaging in *conversation* rather than *lecture* when your child shares a new idea or goal. Ask questions about your child's goal, their fears, and the pros and the cons of the course of action they are suggesting. Discuss with them the steps they can take to make their dream a reality. For most children, the act of considering the pros and the cons of any choice they make and the effect their actions may have on others is enough to guide them in the right direction. Unfortunately, we as parents tend to either lecture or stop talking after contributing our list of things that can go wrong! Of course, share concerns and provide boundaries if the choices your child is making are truly dangerous or wrong. The key is practicing balance.

Slow down, talk WITH your child...and most of all, don't forget to express your belief in them and their capabilities. Use words that share 'courage'---your child may well surprise you in the end.