

Parent and Family Education

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This column is devoted to innovative/special techniques and procedures for working with family and parent training. Contributions or questions should be sent to Joyce and Gary McKay, 1800 N. Heatherbrae, Tucson, Arizona 85715.

This column offers an outline for a three hour workshop on learning how to “encourage self and others.” The model has been used effectively with various groups but is particularly suited for parents. Readers are encouraged to write the column editors with any questions or improvements on the outline.

Encouragement of Self and Others

- I. *Overview of Workshop (5 minutes)*
 - A. Explain that the group will participate in a series of minilectures, discussions and exercises to experience encouragement.
 - B. Tell your group that at the conclusion of the get acquainted exercise they will be in a group of four for most of the remainder of the exercises. They will need to note the strengths of the other members of their group because they will be asked to report their perceptions to those members at the conclusion of the workshop.
- II. *Getting Acquainted—Listening Exercise (25-35 minutes)*
 - A. Ask each person to pick a partner, preferably someone they do not know well.
 - B. The exercise will proceed in the following way:
 1. Each person will tell his/her partner what s/he would like a good friend to know about him/her. (1 minute each)
 2. The partner will silently listen, and then give feedback on what s/he heard the partner say. (1 minute each)
 3. The original speaker will report to the partner on the accuracy of the feedback. (1 minute each)
 4. Ask each pair to decide who will go first—to label themselves A or B. The A's begin talking to the B's, B's give feedback, A's report on accuracy of the feedback. Then roles are reversed, B's talk to A's, etc. (total time: 6 minutes)
 5. Each group of two joins another to make a group of four. The A's of each pair introduce the B's to the other pair. The A's report on the accuracy of the introductions. Then the B's introduce the A's. (1 minute each for each introduction and one minute for reporting on accuracy: total time: 8 minutes)
(NOTE: If your total group is small, you may want each

person introduced to the total group by a member of the other pair. For example, the A of pair 1 will introduce the B of pair 2, etc.)

The group of four will be the permanent group for most of the remainder of the exercises.

III. *Elements of Encouragement—Lecture/discussion (25-30 minutes)*

- A. Ask the group to comment on their feelings during the getting acquainted, listening exercise. Listening and being listened to are potentially encouraging because a person feels valued when another listens.
- B. Define discouragement. Feeling unable to meet life's challenges successfully. Approaches any task with attitude, "Will this enhance or diminish my status." Person is very competitive and travels on a vertical plane in life.
- C. Define encouragement. Feeling capable of meeting life's challenges. Approaches tasks with attitude, "What can I do to help?" Believes personal success is dependent upon success of the group to which s/he belongs—social interest. Person is basically cooperative. Travels on a horizontal plane in life.
- D. Some elements of encouragement: (Elaborate on the following points.)
 1. Courage to be imperfect. Person knows s/he is fallible and accepts this fact. Can tolerate mistakes as minor setbacks and learning experiences. Is willing to take risks.
 2. Acceptance. Person believes all people are worthwhile despite some of their behaviors which may be inappropriate. Person separates deed from doer and is willing to rate behavior rather than a person's (or own) worth.
 3. Focusing on the positive. Person looks for the positive qualities of self and others. S/he does not dwell on mistakes. We live in a mistake centered society and it takes courage to counteract this. Being optimistic and positive is encouraging. "I'd rather be an optimist and be occasionally wrong, than a pessimist and be always right!"
 4. Focusing on contributions, assets and strengths. Person appreciates his/her own and other's contributions. S/he plays to own and other's strengths and finds ways one can contribute by using these assets.
 5. Focusing on effort and improvement. Person knows no one improves unless s/he is willing to acknowledge progress toward a goal. Waiting until the project is completed before any recognition is given, can be discouraging particularly if the task is a difficult one. Believes effort and improvement is equally important to a person's sense of well-being as accomplishment.
 6. Having faith and confidence. Person believes in self and other's power to take charge of one's own life. S/he believes people have the resources to accomplish tasks and make life better.

IV. *Developing Confidence in One's Ability through Discovering Your Own Power—The "I Can't—I Won't" Exercise* (20 minutes)

(NOTE: This is a "back door" experience to discovering one's own power.)

- A. In their groups of four, each person will take turns completing the following sentence: "I can't_____." Tell the group to cover various aspects of their lives, work, recreation, social contacts, home life, etc. Ask them to avoid physical impossibilities, e.g. "I can't be a pro football player." They are to name as many "I can't's" as time allows. (1 minute for each person).
- B. After all members of each group have shared their "I can't's," ask them, in turn, to substitute the words "I won't" for each of their "I can't's." The phrase may not seem to "fit." This is OK for this is just an experiment to see if they experience themselves differently by saying "I won't" instead of "I can't." Explain that just as we try on a pair of shoes to see if they fit, we are trying on "I won't" to see if it fits. Ask them to take note of their feelings when they substitute "I won't" for "I can't." (1 minute for each person)
- C. After each person has completed the switch from "I can't" to "I won't," ask them to discuss in their small groups what they experienced and what they plan to do with the insight they have gained. (10 minutes)

V. *Passive Language—lecture/discussion.* (10 minutes)

- A. Ask the groups to briefly share their observations of the above exercise.
- B. Discuss the purposes of the phrase "I can't" which may be:
 1. *To put others in one's service.* Person does not want to handle responsibilities and tries to get others to do things for him/her.
 2. *To rebel.* Person does not want to do what is asked or demanded. (In childhood, we learned it was safer to say "I can't" than "I won't")
 3. *To be excused.* Person believes s/he is really unable to do what is expected, and displays inadequacy to be exempted from responsibility.

(NOTE: Explain that most "I can't's" mean "I won't" regardless of the purpose because people do have the ability.)

- C. Other passive language used to get out of taking one's responsibility: (Briefly explain how people use the following phrases to excuse and discourage themselves.)
 1. "He made me." Person gives his/her power away. How can things be different if someone else is in control? Ask the group to consider how one actually *makes* another do anything.
 2. "I'll try." Person does not believe something will work and thus "buys insurance" against failure. To make changes, one must commit oneself to an action—"I will"—rather than simply "try" to change.

3. "What if." Person catastrophizes to convince him/herself and others of the impossibility of the effectiveness of a proposed action.
4. "Yes, but." A polite way to say "no." Person agrees with an idea, then completely cancels the idea by saying "but" or synonyms for "but." (NOTE: Not all "yes, but's" are in this category. The word "but" can also be used to qualify as well as negate. Examples: "That idea will work under those conditions, but not in this condition" [qualifying] "I agree with you, but. . ." [negating].)

(THIS IS A GOOD PLACE TO TAKE A BREAK BEFORE PRECEDING WITH THE WORKSHOP: 15 minutes)

VI. *The Power of Expectations—Exercise* (20 minutes)

- A. Combine groups for this exercise. If your group is small, use the total group for the same exercise.
- B. Ask for volunteers to wear labels on their backs. They will not see their own or each other's labels. If your group is small, choose two persons. The larger the group, the more pairs will be needed to wear labels.
- C. One volunteer will wear the label: "Treat me as if I am a capable person." The other volunteer will wear the label: "Treat me as if I am an *incapable* person."
- D. The remainder of the participants will approach the two volunteers, read their labels and treat them as the label instructs. (5 minutes)
- E. Ask the volunteers to exchange labels, without reading either label.
- F. Again, the participants will treat the volunteers according to the instructions on their new labels. (5 minutes)
- G. Discussion. Ask the volunteers to guess the first label they were wearing, then the second. Ask them to describe their feelings with each label. Ask the other participants to report how they felt treating the volunteers according to the instructions on the labels. Ask the group what they learned from this exercise and what they plan to do with the insight. (Expectations are a very powerful influence on human behavior.) (5 minutes)

VII. *The Differences between Praise and Encouragement—Lecture/discussion* (10-15 minutes)

- A. Contrast praise and encouragement by elaborating on the following chart:

<i>Praise</i>	<i>Encouragement</i>
Verbal Reward	Freely given
Must be earned: "You are worthwhile only when you meet my standards."	Emphasizes strengths & assets: "You're good enough as you are." No value judgments.

Awarded for well done, completed tasks	Focuses on effort and improvement. Can be given when person is "down."
Method of control—like punishment	Instills faith
External motivator—person performs only to get reward	Promotes evaluation of own performance
Atmosphere of competition—focuses on self elevation	Atmosphere of cooperation. Focuses on giving, doing, contributing—social interest
Only performers are worthy of praise	All are worthy of encouragement
Equates deed and doer	Separates deed and doer

- B. Self-praise can be encouraging as it is a means of evaluating one's own performance. A pitfall of self-praise is expecting a top performance from one's self at all times.
- C. Briefly explain the difference between the language of praise and encouragement, i.e., Praise contains words which make value judgments: good, great, terrific, etc. Encouragement language focuses on *acceptance*: "I like the way you handled that." (ownership), *improvement*: "You're improving." (tell how), *faith*: "Keep working, you'll make it.", *contribution*: "Thanks for helping, you made my job much easier.", *assets*: "You have a talent for _____, would you do that for us.?", *effort*: "It looks like you really worked hard on that.", *self-evaluation*: "How do you feel about it?"

VIII. *Making a Commitment to Change—Lecture/discussion* (5 minutes)

- A. Decide what behavior you want to change.
- B. Make a firm commitment for a specific period of time (not "from now on," unrealistic and discouraging) "This week I will _____."
- C. Examine how you can "sabotage" your commitment: giving up before test period ends, feeling guilty—"Guilt feelings are good intentions we really don't have!" (Dreikurs), etc.
- D. Evaluate your progress at the end of the test period. Focus on your improvement.

IX. *Strength Bombardment—Exercise* (25 minutes)

- A. In the groups of four, each person first tells his/her own strengths. (2 minutes each)
- B. Immediately after a person tells his/her own strengths, the group adds their observations of strengths during the workshop. (2 minutes each)
- C. After the bombardment, group discusses their feelings of giving and receiving strength bombardment. (5 minutes)

- X. *Summary and Evaluation of Workshop—Discussion* (10 minutes)
- A. Ask the group to tell what they learned from the workshop and what was most meaningful to them.
 - B. Ask for any suggestions for improvement of workshop.

“Even if you are on the right track, you’ll get run over if you just sit there.”

—Will Rogers
