

10 Ways to Encourage Your Child

Jill Savage and I thoroughly enjoyed writing *No More Perfect Kids* to help you. There's a lot of good, practical help in it for when your children question who they are and get frustrated.

As the school year is off and running, I thought this excerpt from the book may be timely for you. I hope so! You can get more if you buy the book. Hint! Hint!

10 Ways to Encourage Your Child

An excerpt from *No More Perfect Kids* by Jill Savage and Dr. Kathy Koch

Parenting is hard work and sometimes it seems our kids do more wrong than right. Add in household responsibilities such as laundry and meals, spilled milk at the breakfast table, a child who comes in from playing outside and is covered in dirt and sibling rivalry in which the kids pick at each other all night, and sometimes life just isn't easy. Fatigue is normal, and frustration is too. Learning not to act unkindly in our frustration is a journey requiring grace for ourselves and our kids.

Even in the midst of real life, it's important to say far more encouraging words to our kids than correcting words. When we *encourage* kids, we give them courage. It's empowering, freeing and strengthening. When encouragement is the norm, children will learn they can take risks, try new things, ask for help and make mistakes without the fear of losing the acceptance, love and support of their parents.

It's not easy to give encouragement, especially on the hard days. There are, however, steps we can take to increase encouragement in our home.

Here are **10 Encouragement Enhancers** you can use in your family:

1. ***Don't expect perfection.*** When we expect perfection, we notice every little thing that's wrong, which creates an environment of discouragement.
2. ***Encourage childlike behavior.*** There's a difference between childish behavior and age-appropriate childlike behavior. Discourage the first and encourage the second.
3. ***Value what your kids learn.*** We need to pay at least as much attention to what's being learned as we do to grades being earned and performances at games and concerts. This is one way we communicate that our kids are more than what they do and how they do.
4. ***Resist the urge to judge all performances.*** One way to emphasize learning rather than performance is not always to ask about their scores or grades.
5. ***Ask them how they feel.*** When talking about one of their athletic competitions, concerts or tests, sometimes ask first how satisfied they were with the outcome. Two-way conversations about grades, concerts and competitions will be more profitable than one-way judgments.
6. ***Notice their strengths.*** Point out their character, attitude and action strengths to help them when they work to make progress in weak areas.
7. ***Don't worry about their challenges.*** Understand some areas will remain challenges for our kids no matter how hard they try. Trying to get kids to change what they can't improve is a sure way to discourage them.
8. ***Celebrate what's real.*** When one child deserves to be celebrated for something significant (for example, no C's on a report card for the first time in a year, a soccer championship, art being displayed in the county library), don't create fake celebrations for your other kids in order to be "fair." Use these opportunities to teach children to genuinely celebrate their siblings.
9. ***Introduce them to overcomers.*** Discuss relatives and

local people your kids know who have overcome great odds. Read biographies and autobiographies of people who have been highly successful even though they also struggled. We can often learn our greatest lessons from our greatest challenges.

10. ***Have fun together.*** Play with your kids. Relationships are deepened while building forts and having tea parties with your little ones and going shopping and watching ball games with your older ones. The fun, relaxed moments you share make tough times easier to walk through and go a long way to creating an encouraging family culture.

Be patient with yourself as you work to increase the encouraging environment in your family. If you choose too many things to change, you and your kids will be overwhelmed, and you will make little progress. Don't look back with shame or guilt either. Today is a perfect day to look forward with hope, choose one Encouragement Enhancer to start with and walk in a positive direction! {eoa}

Dr. Kathy Koch is the author of *Screens & Teens: Connecting With Our Kids in a Wireless World.*