Discouraging? Or Encouraging?

Adult’s reactions to children’s actions and words can be key to children becoming either discouraged or encouraged. The left hand list shows some common ways that we discourage children. Follow the right hand list to examine some options for encouraging.

**Discourage**

1. **Focus on mistakes (criticize)**
   When we continually point out mistakes, children believe that they are mistake-makers, and they lose sight of the possibility of doing well.

2. **Set negative expectations**
   “You always make such a mess! Try to be more careful.”

3. **Demand perfection**
   “You need to spend more time on your homework. If you study hard you should be able to get all A’s.”

4. **Overprotect**
   A child’s greatest handicap is the parent who supervises everything a child does, who does too much for him or her, and who protects the child from the consequences of his actions.

5. **Compare and promote competition**
   “Why can’t you keep your room neat like your sister does?”

6. **Use labels (good, bad, lazy, bully, ...)**
   When we label children, they begin to believe those labels and live as if that is who they are.

**Encourage**

1. **Build on strengths**
   Accept mistakes as opportunities to learn. Look for the parts of the project that are done well and comment on those things. Gently point out things that can be improved.

2. **Show confidence**
   “That is a difficult decision. I’m sure you’ll work it out.”

3. **Appreciate efforts**
   Focus on what has been done rather than waiting for a completed job. Show appreciation for the child’s help.

4. **Stimulate independence**
   Encourage children to try new things and do things for themselves. Within the limits of reasonable safety, allow children to live with the consequences of their choices.

5. **See performance through child’s eyes**
   “It looks as if you really enjoyed doing that.” “I’ll bet you are feeling pretty good about that.”

6. **Deemphasize roles.**
   Encourage your children to do the things that they are not so good at as well as the things that come easily to them. Avoid putting them into “boxes.”

Beth Johnson 2006/05/08 Compiled from a number of Adlerian sources
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