

Encouragement:

There are many ways to show love. One of these ways is encouragement. Encouragement touches the heart of the other recipient. Within the act of encouragement there is a hidden genuflection toward the ordeal of life. Whether you are a parent who gives encouragement to a child, a wife giving encouragement to a husband, an adult giving encouragement to an aging parent, you are giving a precious gift. Encouragement is literally 'to give courage'. And courage is, according to ancient philosophers, the most noble of the virtues

When your partner praises or compliments you, you may doubt its sincerity. If he criticises you, you may reject him. If he ignores you or hurts you will find it hard to forgive. However, if he encourages you, you blossom. It feels right because encouragement does not judge you or evaluate you. It wants you to be true to yourself. It is a gift that your heart responds to.

For this reason encouragement is related to your dreams and your longings. To the degree that you are encouraged your dreams are made real. Even in the smallest of ways.

When you say or do anything that says to your child to trust him/herself it enables courage and confidence. Or if you say to your life partner "Trust yourself. Trust your assessment of what you need to do. You have more wisdom than you think", it is worth a thousand words of directive advice. When we encourage people to be true to themselves it does ten times more than any form of correction or criticism. When you encourage someone you applaud their small efforts, you appreciate their little successes, and you encourage them in their goals.

Encouragement received during times of distress is always appreciated. Words or deeds that say "hang-in-there – you'll get through this" are worth so much more than praise during your times of success.

If you are a parent you will know that so much of learning and education is more to do with encouragement than knowledge. Encouragement is what enables you to persist. So whether it's about tying a shoelace, completing a sum, colouring a picture, or finishing a project, encouragement more than information is what helps the child learn. Encouragement touches the soul and spirit because it recognises the sometimes lonely isolation of solitary effort.

Something as little as an encouraging word, a caress, an "it's okay" can mean so very much in the language of intimacy. Nonverbal signs that someone is for you, on your side, behind you, holding you up or there to lean on can be deeply reassuring. You will even notice that the compliment of a passing stranger can have an endearing effect

There are few things as deeply affirming as the encouragement of your friend, spouse, or parent when self-doubt comes to haunt you. When we are climbing the incline of our everyday life, when we seem to wade in a river of stress, we sometimes need only a small bit of encouragement to ensure that we make it to our little summit, or across to the riverbank of our everyday goals. A little phrase to encourage you such as "you are my hero, you know that", is to your heart what a little water is to a wilting flower.

Encouragement says: "If you make a mistake, that's okay. We all make mistakes. We all say things we don't mean, do things we don't like, or feel like giving up when things don't work out for us. It's okay to feel that but tomorrow is another day, and you can try again. Failure is not falling down. It's staying down. I am here to help you up".

What encouragement means for a child or adult is that fears can be overcome; that you will be held if you fall; that fear is normal; that you are greater than your fear; that someone believes in you; that we need to lean on someone; that someone sees how hard you have been trying; that your invisible efforts are visible; that you are not being judged; that failure is ok; that you can lean on someone and into something; that you are not alone; that life requires courage. Or, to put it poetically:

"When things go wrong as they sometimes will,
When the road you're trudging seems all up hill,
When the funds are low and the debts are high
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit,
Rest if you must, but don't you quit.
Love is strange with its ups and downs
One day were poets, the next day clowns,
And after many a fall when you don't get up
You might have succeeded if with it you'd stuck;
So do not give up, though it feels that you've lost –
You will endure despite the cost.
Courage is fear turned inside out –
The sword of faith that that will slay self-doubt,
Your striving and effort is what I love and admire,
Therein is your success, your passion and fire;
So rise to your feet and you shall see
I will cheer you onward toward the best you can be."

Encouragement validates even the smallest of dreams. It orients you to being more than you are. It imagines possibility, growth and expansion. It recognises that life asks something heroic of you – to overcome the small adversities of everyday life - be it a bad mood, or things just not going your way. It simply says "I believe in you".