

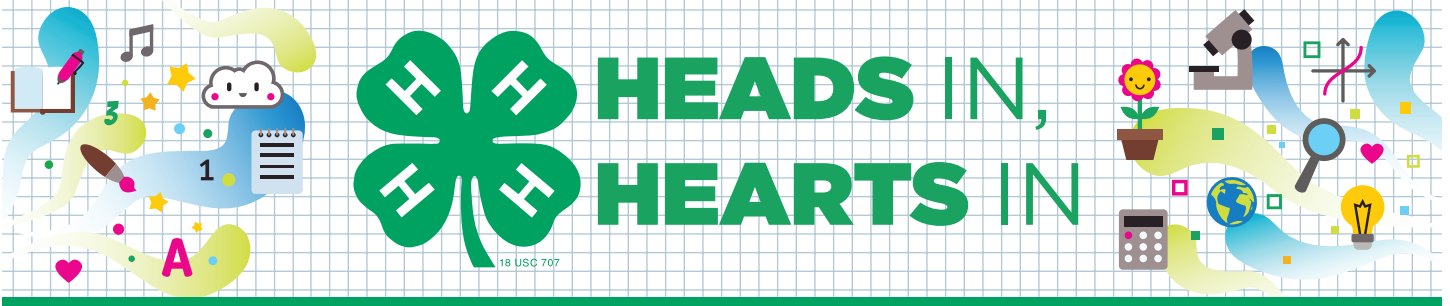
Supplies

- “Guide for Families” handout
- Clear plastic standup display (optional)
- Craft pipe cleaners
- Other building materials (blocks, Legos [or similar], boxes)
- Paper
- Crayons
- “Encouragement” handout
- Display table

Activity Preparation

- ▶ Purchase or locate items on supply list.
- ▶ Print one copy of the “Guide for Families” handout. Laminate or place in a clear plastic standup display to allow participants to see it more readily.
- ▶ Print one copy of the “Encouragement” handout.





Building Encouragement

Guide for Families

Learning Objectives

What you need to know:

Social emotional health is a critical component of healthy development for young children. Social emotional development includes the ability to identify and label or name emotions, and find appropriate ways to express or manage those emotions. For young children, strong emotions can be overwhelming. Since they do not have the skills to handle them, they might act out, get clingy or withdraw. You can help them manage their emotions by giving them permission to feel the way they do, helping to identify how they feel, supporting them and teaching them emotion regulation strategies. Children need adults in their lives who are engaged, tuned in and love them unconditionally.

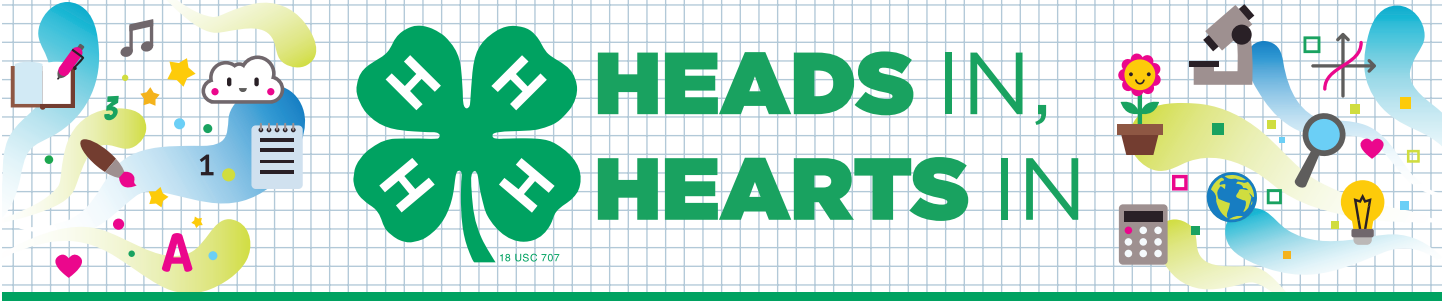
Encouraging children and communicating love to them helps build their **self-concept** (the way they feel about themselves). Encouragement can be a powerful tool for getting children to behave and reinforcing positive behaviors. Think of encouragement as investing in the child; every time you encourage them, you build them up.

What you will do and learn:

In this activity, you will build something with the child and encourage their efforts along the way. Practicing encouraging your child can help you build a strong, supportive relationship with them while developing a positive emotional connection.

Instructions

1. Choose an activity to do with the child (drawing, creating with pipe cleaners, or building with blocks, boxes or some other material that you have).
2. Tell the child you will be building or making something together. Work together with the child to build or make something, making sure that each of you have a chance to add to the creation.
3. As you build, give the child specific positive encouragements. Focus on the process and avoid evaluating or judging. Try phrases such as, "I noticed that you chose the green crayon and you are making big green circles on the paper," or "Wow! You were looking for a place to fit that yellow block and you kept looking until you found one." Use the "Encouragement" handout for ideas on what to say.
4. When you are both done with the creation, talk about the hard work involved and encourage the child by talking about their strengths: "We worked so hard to build this together. I like working together with you. You are so creative."
5. Repeat this encouragement exercise when doing tasks with the child.

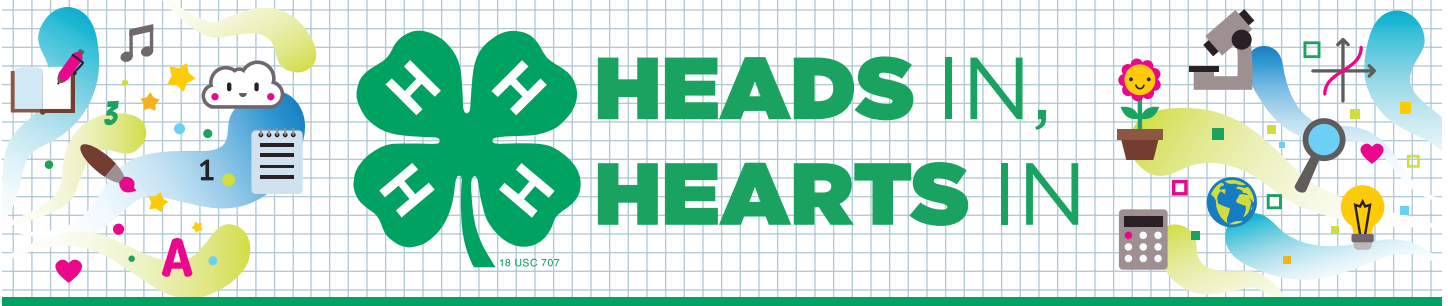


Building Encouragement

Encouragement Handout

Tips for Encouraging Young Children:

- ▶ **Call attention to desired behavior.** It's easy to point out when children are doing something wrong. Even with the best intentions of trying to discourage negative behavior, this method doesn't teach children what they should do. Pay attention to the behavior you want more of. When the child shares, waits their turn or takes a deep breath before they yell in anger, give them lots of positive attention. Children will repeat any behaviors that get attention. Children want lots of positive attention from you, and if they don't get it, they will accept negative attention. Talking about what the child did in a positive and specific way also teaches them what is important. Do it in a way that avoids making them feel guilty or shameful. You are "catching them being good" and commenting on it in a respectful way.
- ▶ **Focus on the process.** Nobody is perfect. If we encouraged only perfection, the child would never be encouraged. Pay attention to the process, their effort and their feelings about it. Instead of a general "Great work!" or "Nice job," talk about what you noticed. "You worked hard to clean up your toys. I see that you found all the cars and put them on the shelf." If you're having trouble getting started, try starting with the phrase, "I notice. . ." Encouraging the child's process will help them appreciate their own hard work and will encourage them to keep trying and practice persistence.
- ▶ **Be specific.** This helps the child know exactly the behavior you are encouraging. When the toddler comes to the dinner table with clean hands, you say, "You washed with soap! That's good!" Avoid general praise like "Terrific!" or "Wonderful!"
- ▶ **Avoid the "but."** It is easy to encourage the child while also trying to teach them a lesson: "You helped your brother find his shoes, but you didn't put your own shoes on like I asked." These messages can be confusing, and the child will often only hear the second part of the sentence, and not the encouragement. Try separating instructions from your encouragement: "You helped your brother find his shoes. Let's see if we can find yours together."
- ▶ **Be genuine.** Make your words match your body language and voice. Smile, make eye contact, give a thumbs-up, say the child's name, and add in some hugs and kisses whenever possible. When children feel seen and appreciated, they feel secure, loved and encouraged.



- ▶ **Be a model for self-encouragement.** Encourage yourself out loud in front of the children for something you did. “I was having such a hard time figuring out how to fix the TV, but I kept trying and I figured it out. Go me!” Modeling self-praise will teach the child to value their own work and give them the words to describe their feelings.
- ▶ **Just imagine.** Parents of challenging children can feel overwhelmed and discouraged. That alone can make it difficult to notice their positive behaviors. Come up with a list of things you really like about the child (forgiving, creative, enthusiastic) and think about the behaviors you would like to see less of (hitting, yelling, talking back). Picture in your mind the child doing the exact opposite of those negative behaviors (keeping their hands to themselves, using calm words, listening to you). Now treat the child as if they are already capable of behaving that way