

Robinsons on Parallel Power of Encouragement

Theo Joosten at the International Summer School of Adlerian/Dreikursian Psychology (ICASSI) presented a valuable lecture on the Power of Encouragement. Theo works year round to make the classes, lectures, and facilities happen for the participants and volunteer teachers for ICASSI. In his introduction, he was described as concise, goal directed, inclusive, and respectful. He was described as a model for encouragement because he believes in the competence of others in developing confidence at their own speed. O! To be so described, what compliments!

Encouragement, genuinely offered, is the success factor in raising children, in families, in schools, in the workplace, and in professional settings. It is a fundamental topic, even a cornerstone, of Adlerian Psychology. It is first of all an attitude not an educational technique. We constantly encourage or discourage those around us.

Key aspects of encouragement include society, our environment, and our upbringing. A “helicopter parent”, which is the current description of an overprotective parent, is not an encouraging parent. When we do too much for our children, we send the message that we don’t think they can handle things. Often they CAN handle life’s work, but our doing it for them says, “I am more competent; I can handle this better than you.” And not, “I believe you can do it if you try again” or “Let’s do it together.” Or “Knowing you, I’m sure you’ll do fine.”

At a minimum we can learn to avoid discouragement. We can learn the language of encouragement and use the words of encouragement to cheer on our children, colleagues, spouses, partners, and friends.

Theo then asked us to think of one or more persons who have been encouraging to us in our lifetime.

Then we listed the Fundamentals of Encouragement:

- Listening
- Treating with Respect
- Taking time for me
- Looking for solutions
- Being allowed to make mistakes
- Helping me to see the positive side of a challenge
- No blaming
- Feeling of acceptance
- Sense of humor
- Friendly tone of voice
- Appreciative of effort

Mr. Joosten described the social feeling that all humans share and needs to be developed—Adlerians call it belongingness, solidarity, interest in others and in general problems, being part of the whole, and togetherness. Hans Ansbacher has described it this way: “Seeing with the eyes of another; hearing with the ears of another, and feeling with the heart.”

A courageous person looks at situations as opportunities, sees consequences, and trusts his/her own ability to handle the situations. A courageous person realizes that making mistakes is not personal, and often unavoidable. The courageous person has the **COURAGE TO BE IMPERFECT**. Courageous people believe in themselves and focus on situations with the purpose of serving the whole.

Theo Joosten also pointed out that encouraging for one person may not be encouraging for another. The receiver decides if the words or action are encouraging. The sender simply looks at the reaction

to determine if the encouragement was accepted in a positive way. An encouraging attitude in a teacher, parent, and supervisor in the work place provides productivity. However, a discouraged person cannot be very encouraging. That's when self-encouragement can be very valuable, a tool that we can all develop with practice.

The quoted Raymond Corsini who provided these FOUR BASIC PRINCIPLES that are based on SOCIAL EQUALITY:

- Respect for self, others, the environment
- Responsibility for self, others, the environment
- Resourcefulness
- Responsiveness (belongingness, social feeling)

Description of an Encouraging Attitude:

- Saying and believing: "You can do it."
- Showing another: "It's all right to try."
- Providing opportunities for success.
- Show confidence in another
- Accept others as they are
- Guarantee rights (Always remembering there are some limits; some rights; some structure in any challenge)

It is true that we can't build on weaknesses; we build on competencies.

In the Language of Encouragement we realize that intonation and body position are important. **It is not what we say but how we say it.** Also, of interest in Theo's lecture was this concept: **THERE IS NO CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM.** Constructive criticism is considered to be an oxymoron; you know, like "giant shrimp" or "United Methodists."

As teachers, parents, supervisors we do the following to be encouraging.

1. Mention the activity.
2. Be specific and objective.
3. Avoid the use of “try.” Try indicates doubt.
4. Avoid but (“but” undermines encouragement).
5. Do not compare to another.
6. Appreciate the effort.

Encouragement is one of my favorite topics. I hope to be remembered as an encourager. Theo Joosten demonstrates encouragement in his life and teaching as portrayed in this lecture in Switzerland this summer. All who heard it benefited from his research and delivery.