

# Robinsons on Parallel Encouragement in Treatment A Lecture by Yoav Shoham at ICASSI, 2012

Yoav Shoham, an Adlerian Psychology teacher at ICASSI, specializes in Encouragement. He strongly believes that encouragement is valuable for teachers, children, parents, spouses, and in the treatment of stressed and mentally ill persons. Yoav works with individual clients, families, and couples, and with his wife, Donna, in Parent Education. Yoav an Encouragement scholar in his own right began his lecture with a tribute to his mentor Edna Nash - who taught him many of the principles of Encouragement.

Yoav's own definition of Encouragement is that it "strengthens a person's spirit, thereby creating a change in one's perception of oneself, improving one's opinion of oneself, increasing the confidence in one's strengths, and bringing one to the conclusion that he/she is good and worthy just as s/he is."

Yoav has two postulations:

1. It is impossible to teach someone to encourage.
2. Everyone can learn to encourage.

This is a very interesting proposition in that it seems illogical. What I believe Yoav meant was that a person must first be encouraged and feel empowered by that encouragement in order to be able to share it with another. Moreover, it cannot be taught; it must be experienced. I am challenged into thinking of ways to spread the valuable, joyful experience of encouragement to other people.

The Principles of Encouragement are as follows:

1. Accepting the individual, as he/she is without conditions—Every person has the capacity to interpret. It is one of the great equalizers of being a human being.
2. Promoting Mutual Respect, a cornerstone of Adlerian Psychology/Beliefs, is not hurting, not disregarding, but listening, and accepting the fact that there are differences among persons.
3. Emphasizing the positive—focusing on WHAT IS not WHAT IS LACKING. In every reality there is always something positive—no matter how small. Finding it and acknowledging it is the beginning of encouragement!
4. Recognizing effort—If an individual has given his/her best, that effort should be acknowledged. That way everyone makes progress.
5. Decreasing the important of mistakes and derived from that, decreasing the fear of making mistakes. The mistake is the basis for new learning.
6. Progressing gradually, beginning with the recognition of one's capabilities.
7. Enabling other people to take responsibility, teaching them in very small steps.
8. Believing truthfully and deeply in the other person. Knowing that others depend on you and believe in you gives you power.

9. Facilitating a feeling of belonging enhances our lives. If we feel that we belong, we can better deal with the tasks of life.
10. Sharing and cooperating means that we all have value.

Equally important is to recognize is that there is a major difference between Praise and Encouragement. Praise has a very discouraging element hidden in its' meaning. (The hidden element is "you need to please me, because I am your superior."). It is critical that Encouragement is given without connection to results: "Look how far you've come."

For example, grades refer to the result of a student's work. They are focused on the high achieving individual while Encouragement is the necessary element to urge on the progress the student is making, whether or not s/he is a high achiever!

Encouragement develops the ability of the following skills in independence—a goal parents want for their children:

- Self-monitoring
- Self-encouragement
- Trust in others and oneself
- Enhanced closeness and support

These valuable principles of Encouragement are applied in teaching, parenting, partnering, and in the work place. However, encouragement is extremely therapeutic in treatment:

- Cling to a little humor when life is tough.
- Strengths are identified in Early Memories.
- Clients learn to allow others to help.
- Clients are taught how to ask for help.
- Clients find others who will provide encouragement.
- Clients learn to encourage themselves and others.

In closing, while these lyrics from Woody Guthrie's ballad, "This land is your land; this land is my land; this land was made for you and me," had a very specific purpose for Americans. Yoav rewrote this song for all encouragers, "Encouragement is yours; encouragement is mine; encouragement was made for you and me." This educational counselor, certified in Trauma Work and Cognitive Behavior Therapy, is a quintessential "Adlerian" in soul and body. Surely, for those he meets, he is the accomplished encourager.

Note: In addition to Edna Nash's teaching the basics of Encouragement, Yoav used an article written in Israel by Yotam and Elul, who based their research on the work of Dreikurs and Dinkmeyer.