

### Module 3: Helping Others Find Their Way: Effective Encouragement

What if you had the superpower of encouragement? How would you use that superpower?  
What if the things you said actually made it more likely that people would achieve their goals?  
What if you could help friends, family and any team you're on be happier and more successful?

Encouragement can backfire if it's not done the right way.

Simply telling someone "you're smart" may make them feel good for the moment, but can hurt future performances because it prompts them to worry about new challenges: Researchers have actually measured the damage.

These results show how much positive impact our words can have on people.

Of course, you can't make someone have a growth mindset, they must choose it for themselves. Observe the world from a growth mindset perspective and challenges seem like opportunities.

Why is misguided encouragement so bad? Well, that's a deep question.

One way to think about it is that it judges and labels people for who they "are:" smart, talented or otherwise. Even when it means well, the problem is that it focuses people on being judged and judging themselves, something that none of us is very good at really. Perhaps that's why we're sometimes warned about being quick to judge others, or ourselves. It tends to make us defensive, raising fears that distract us from opportunities to grow.

**If you get the wrong kind of encouragement, how could you turn it around?**

If someone says "you're smart," ask them what you "did smart?"

Refocus the conversation off of you and back on what you can learn from what you did.

**If someone says you're good at something, how can you refocus attention on what you did?**

**How could you use this research to provide encouragement to the people around you?**

In another of Dr. Dweck's studies, she saw a similar pattern based on the way teachers praised others: specifically, the way they talked about great mathematicians.

Teachers who described them as natural geniuses who easily discovered things passed on a fixed mindset that resulted in lower student performance.

But teachers who talked about mathematicians as people who got curious about math and whose passion led them to work hard saw students improve.

**How could your school improve the kind or amount of encouragement teachers give students?**

**How could this class improve the kind or amount of encouragement provided to one other?**

**What difference could more effective encouragement make for you? For your peers?**

**What do you think would be the biggest obstacle to improving encouragement we give?**

**What could we do as a class to overcome that obstacle?**

### Module 3: Helping Others Find Their Way: Encouragement Mentoring

How do you think encouragement affects learning?

Encouragement gives us perspective to see things that are hard to see for ourselves. It enables us to tap energy we didn't know we had to achieve things we didn't know we could. That's why effective encouragement is a critical mentoring skill to help people you care about. Take time to develop this skill by practicing 4 ways to give Quinn effective encouragement.

1. Instead of judging people for who they “are,” effective encouragement focuses on what they “did:”
  - their effort,
  - their perseverance
  - or the strategies they used.

It sounds like:

“Good job”, Way to give your all” or “Nice pass; you guys are really working as a team out there.”

So, when a friend spends time practicing a new and difficult song over and over again, what encouragement could you say to focus more on their on effort instead of ability?

2. Effective encouragement is also as specific as possible.

That's because when we succeed at something, we're often not really sure why.

Effective encouragement points out exactly what worked well,  
so that it's easier to do it again.

It sounds like:

“Love your design for the poster, each revision you did got better and better.

Now the image makes people look twice and the rhyming, short slogan is so memorable;  
I can tell you put a lot of thought into it.”

So, when a friend gets a good grade on an English paper, what encouragement could you give.

3. To focus people on what they did right, effective encouragement is the gift of a question that provides time to pause and reflect:

It sounds like:

“Nice work on the science test.

I'm really proud of the way you kept trying different strategies to learn it.

I'm curious, what seemed to work best for you?”

So, when a friend apologizes for a mistake and repairs a relationship with a friend after a fight, what encouragement could you give them in the form of a question?

#### 4. Of course, we also need encouragement when we feel overwhelmed.

Effective encouragement helps us to focus on a way forward:

It sounds like:

“I know math used to be easy for you, and it isn’t right now,  
but that also means that you’ll grow more by taking on this challenge.  
This is your next big step. It might feel a little scary,  
but I’m excited for what you’ll discover you can learn when you really work your hardest.”

**So, when a friend is worried about a new teacher grading harder,  
what encouragement could you give?**

Effective encouragement takes practice.  
But if you simply help people focus on what they’re doing well,  
then your encouragement will become more and more powerful.

**What would you say to teach others about how to use effective encouragement?**

Now that you’ve been given this superpower,  
it’s up to you to decide how to use it to reshape the lives of the people around you.

**How would you like to start using it?**

This research also points out how labels can lead students to a fixed mindset view of abilities.  
Students who have been labeled “talented and gifted” or “special” may benefit more from help  
on refocusing attention on how they can grow.

A final word from Dr. Dweck’s Mindset book about what to do when a student succeeds without  
needing to work hard. When this happens, say,

“Whoops. I guess that was too easy.  
I apologize for wasting your time.  
Let’s do something you can really learn from.”

And when a student works hard but doesn’t succeed:

“I like the effort you put in,  
but let’s work together some more to figure out what you don’t understand.  
Everyone learns in a different way.  
Let’s keep trying to find the way that works for you.”

**What do you think a teacher might say to either of these students?**