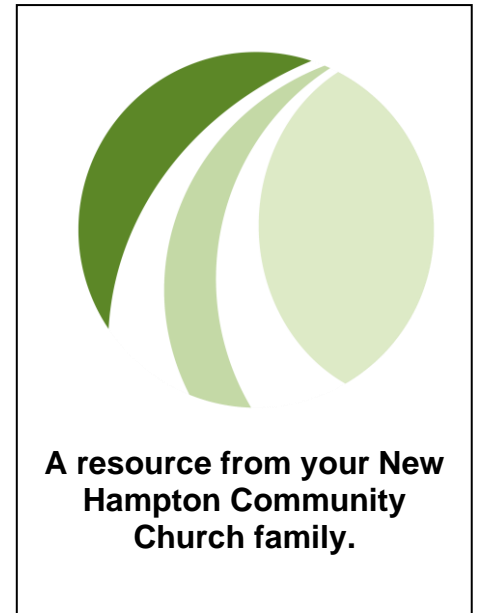




January

parenting CHRISTIAN kids



Encourage One Another Often

POWERSOURCE

ASK JESUS:

1. To remind you to frequently encourage family members.
2. To bless you through the Bible, prayer, worship, and fellowship.
3. To provide people in your life who serve as encouragers, especially during tough times.

A recent New Year's trend involves choosing one word as a theme or focus for the next 12 months. For parents, a great word to choose—and remember regularly—is “encourage.”

At times, it seems as if the parental job description involves being children's #1 fan, but true encouragement goes much deeper than cheerleading. Genuine messages of love and support nurture a child's sense of safety and well-being. Godly affirmations also build self-worth—one based not on individual merit but on the fact that our heavenly Father created and loves us.

Being an encourager also comes with fantastic “perks.” When you lift

up others, you too will be uplifted. As Proverbs 11:25 (NASB) says, “He who waters will himself be watered.”

Encouragers follow Jesus' example of service, humility, and generosity. Like Barnabas—a member of the early Christian community whose name means “son of encouragement” (see Acts 4:36)—you can serve God by selflessly encouraging others.

Parents need as much support and encouragement as they can get, too. Seek out other Christian parents so you can give and receive assistance, share insights and ideas, and pray for one another.

Read on to learn more about the importance of encouragement—and how to live it out in your family.

An Encouragement Primer



TEACHABLE MOMENTS

A Burst of Encouragement

You'll need a roll of yellow or orange crepe-paper streamers and a bright inflated balloon. Stand in a circle and wrap the streamer around one hand, then pass the roll to someone across the circle, and offer encouraging words (for example, "You're great at helping with housework" or "You're always honest with me"). Continue until everyone has several turns.

Then say: **Wow, we've created a sunburst! Now let's very gently use our sunburst to toss a sun in the air.** Add the balloon to the center and play a while, picking up the "sun" as needed.

Afterward, ask: **How is keeping the balloon in the air like trying to stay encouraged? When is it easy—and tough—to feel encouraged? How can kind words lift us up? In what ways does God support and cheer us?**

Read aloud Proverbs 12:25. Then close in prayer, thanking God for the gift of kind, encouraging words.

Encouragement is vital and powerful yet amazingly simple. Look kids in the eyes and talk to them on their level. Reach out and touch them gently. Call children by name lovingly—not just when they're in trouble! Listen carefully and be willing to learn. Accentuate the positive. Be generous with praise. Compliment frequently, sincerely, and in public. Show interest in children's hobbies. Give credit where credit is due. Give age-appropriate challenges. Ask, "How can I help?" Also work on your own self-worth; you can't love and encourage others if you feel unloved, unlovable, or discouraged.

Fill 'er Up! Decorate a glass jar and place it in a special spot in your home. Cut patterned papers into strips, giving family members their own pattern. Starting January 1, fill the jar with love notes, Bible verses, quotes, and affirmations for each person. On Valentine's Day, read the notes as a family. Carry on the tradition at regular intervals all year long to keep everyone's "encouragement tanks" topped off.

"Acts" of Encouragement

Beforehand, brainstorm situations where kids and adults might need encouragement (for example, taking a test, feeling sick, being new to a class or job). Write each one on a slip of paper. Then play Encouragement Charades. The person who picks a slip acts out that situation. The first person to guess it then acts out a way to offer encouragement. (Speaking is allowed for that part!)

Be a Barnabas Form pairs. Give each pair a book. Have one partner walk across a room and back with a book balanced on their head. Have the other partner walk along and offer encouragement. Then change roles. Afterward, ask: "How did it feel to have someone there all the time encouraging you?" Read aloud Acts 11:22-24. Ask: "What types of encouragement did

Barnabas offer? What made him such a good encourager? What types of encouragement do you need most? In what ways can you encourage other people?"

God Uses You! Encourage family members by reminding them that God chooses and works through them. Say: "In the Bible, God chooses ordinary people for special tasks. David, a shepherd boy, defeated the giant Goliath and later became king. Mary, a teenage girl, became baby Jesus' mother. Let's see how God makes these choices." Read aloud 1 Samuel 16:7. Ask: "What do you think God cares about? Why do you think God works through average, ordinary people? How does that encourage you to listen to and serve God?"

That's Encouraging! Say: "Family members are special encouragers to one another, as we see in the Bible. When Mary hears she's going to have baby Jesus, she visits her cousin Elizabeth." Read aloud Luke 1:39-45. Ask: "How might Elizabeth have made Mary feel? What is it like when someone encourages you? What kinds of encouragement can we give each other?" Pray, asking God for help to encourage one another—especially family members.

**"So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing."
—1 Thessalonians 5:11**