

# The Art of Encouragement



## A Practical Guide To Parenting

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Jason N. Snow, PhD

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## About the Author

Dr. Jason Snow's educational background includes earning a Bachelor of Science (B.S.) majoring in psychology and sociology, a Master of Science (M.S.) in Professional Counseling, an Education Specialist (Ed.S.) in Professional Counseling, and a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Counseling and Psychological Services. He is also a Board Certified Forensic Examiner (BCFE) specializing in child custody, child abuse, and domestic violence issues. Dr. Snow is a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC), holds a Diplomat in Forensic Psychology, and is a Fellow of the American College of Forensic Examiners (FACFE).

Dr. Snow has worked in several environments as a mental health professional including a large, state mental psychiatric hospital; a prison setting as an Offender Rehabilitation Counselor; as the Clinical Director of a partial hospitalization program; a Clinical Director in a long-term residential psychiatric facility; an Executive Director of a Memory Care Facility; and a Clinical Director of a large, community mental health center. In addition, he has done over two decades of outpatient counseling and family therapy with a wide variety of individuals and families who are either self-referred or court-ordered.

Dr. Snow has published numerous articles on the topics of parenting programs, forensic issues, and family therapy techniques. These articles have appeared in major, peer-reviewed journals in the field of psychology and counseling for almost two decades. He also serves as a Contributing Editor for the *Journal of Individual Psychology*, which is a journal specializing in Adlerian psychology theory and techniques.



Currently, Dr. Snow is the founder of a company called *When You're CONNECTED, LLC* (also known as CONNECTED). Information about CONNECTED can be found at the website [www.youareconnected.info](http://www.youareconnected.info) along with various resources that can help parents, teachers, and professionals in becoming more effective in their roles. Through CONNECTED, Dr. Snow teaches parent education classes through private and public school settings, organizational settings, and private practice. He has been a guest lecturer for years in professional psychological conferences; presented numerous workshops; provided consultation services both in the United States and internationally; and trained numerous parent educators over the years.

The motivation to write this book comes from feedback of numerous parents, students, and clients over the years. Based on the concept originally taught by Dr. Alfred Adler, a psychiatrist whose work is fundamental to successful parenting practices, the concepts of psychology are only beneficial if accessible to everyone. Therefore, the goal of this book is to provide useful, practical skills that have been tested and shown to be effective in helping parents overcome their challenges in raising responsible children in today's difficult society.



## Introduction

To get started, I would like for you to think back to a time in your life when you had to undertake a new task or accomplish something important. This could be a situation in your personal life or it could be something that you considered as a means to earn a living. How did you start the process of being successful? Did you ask for advice from a friend or supervisor, did you watch someone else and learn from his/her mistakes and successes, or did you jump right in and learn by trial and error? There are several opportunities throughout life where we each are faced with such scenarios and those who are most successful seem to be the ones who have a firm understanding of the requirements, support from others, and have the courage to be imperfect while taking calculated risks.

Now think of all the jobs that either you or your friends have had over the years and select the one that was the most challenging. Was the challenge because you found that you had received little training before starting or had little prior experience to draw upon to help guide your way? Was one of the biggest challenges that you had to work long hours and little time to collect yourself between tasks? Have you ever had a job where it seemed that the responsibilities were never-ending, the demands of your time and attention felt (at times) to exceed your abilities, and the outcome of your work had significance beyond compare? If you have answered ‘yes’ to any of the questions in this paragraph ... two things are probably true about you: (1) you are a parent and (2) you have some insight into what is required to be a parent.



While parenting is arguably one of the most important endeavors that anyone in a society can undertake and has many benefits beyond compare, it is surprising the lack of education and proper training that society provides to help ensure that parents are successful. Most parents find themselves relying on their memories of how they were raised, adding on things learned during conversations with other parents, and finished off with a healthy dose of trial-and-error to structure their approach.

### **You are not alone**

After years of teaching parents how to raise responsible, self-reliant, and emotionally health children, I am frequently told by parents that they are amazed to learn that things they struggle with are similar to other parents. It is a common discovery of parents that their child raising problems are not unique, bizarre, or outlandish – quite the opposite, many parents have similar questions and experiences. Parents are always surprised to hear that no matter how ‘bad’ things seemed to have gotten before they come to a parenting class, there are always parents in the class that are experiencing the same types of misbehaviors in their children as well. And it is not uncommon that the parents who feel they are the most lost or in need of the most help typically are the ones who are viewed as the most courageous because they are working to understand their situation and, more importantly, how to improve the situation for both themselves and their children.

One of the most interesting concepts in psychology is that we are all, in varying degrees, social creatures. The positive aspect of this is that we can learn from each other and find strength in our relations with others. The downside of being social creatures is that most of our challenges in life come from our interactions with others. Sometimes





these challenges are due to incompatibilities between our own immaculate perception of events versus how the other person perceives it (this is explained in more detail later on in the book). Other times our struggles with other people come from us misperceiving the motivations of others and acting accordingly (again, this is discussed in more detail later in the book). The important thing to remember though at this point is that you are not alone in your current struggles and that by learning certain concepts and skills, which will be covered in detail throughout this book, that you can overcome even the most challenging interpersonal obstacles.

### **Brief history and orientation**

I would like to take credit for the idea of writing this book; however, I actually started it very reluctantly. My personality is one that is much more conducive to being a teacher and presenter rather than a writer. While there were several instances in my clinical work over the years where I really wished that I had such a book available to provide to parents and counseling clients, the idea sitting down and writing a book seemed to be tedious and overwhelming. I am amazed by those individuals, both fictional writers and non-fictional writers, who seem to be able to turn out books because I can appreciate the time, energy, and dedication required. Having written numerous research articles, which are substantially shorter than the typical book, I knew this process would be one that would require significant energy.

Several parents in my parenting classes over the years shared their ideas of trying to avoid taking the usual approach and writing the typical self-help book, but instead suggested that I write book that compiles the various lectures I have given in my parenting classes and try to tie them together by chapters to form the book. Maybe



because of the various encouragements over the years from my parents, clients, students, and colleagues, this suggestion seemed to start making perfect sense in formulating this book. Years later, when supervising others to become parent educators, I again was approached with repeated suggestions to take the time to write my lectures down or create a manual that others could refer to when learning to teach parenting. Therefore, I would like to thank the various individuals over the years who have offered this unique suggestion because it is what eventually led to the completion of this project.

I reluctantly started the process of writing everything down in the early 2000's; however, must admit that other projects such as my teaching, lecturing, training, and seeing clients always seemed to push this project aside. I even had a few ambitious students who took it upon themselves to come to multiple parenting programs and attempt to capture my lectures as I was actually teaching the class. While initially this seemed to be a workable solution to putting everything down in writing, there were some unexpected barriers to this method of creating a book. The main barrier is that the students were trying to simultaneously learn what I was teaching while also trying to capture what was being presented, which created gaps in understanding and general knowledge across each of the lessons.

Based on the suggestions that I received over the years from these motivating parents and students I decided to take on the task to write this book as if you, the reader, were sitting in one of my parenting classes. I will explain complex psychological theories as they pertain to child rearing; however, make a conscious effort not to use complex, fancy words throughout the book because that is not helpful. I know from past experience that it can be frustrating when people who are supposed to be knowledgeable



about a topic use complex concepts and professional jargon just to express their ideas. So, my promise to you is that nothing will be harder to understand in this book than what is presented in this introduction.

I will also use stories, examples, and even tell you at times exactly what to say and how to say it when implementing the concepts covered in the various lessons. Likewise, there will be parts of this book where any parent can read the instructions on how to talk, direct, or set limits with a child and be successful. In some chapters, I will give you word maps which are phrases that you can use in certain situations where you just plug in a word or two to fit the situation. Historically, in some of my parenting classes, I have suggested that parents who have bad short term memories may wish to write these word maps down on their arm so that in stressful situations they can just roll up their sleeves and speak respectfully and effectively. This of course is just a humorous suggestion; however, if a parent ever does this and finds it effective, please feel free to write me and share this experience so I can use it as an example in future parenting groups.

Just like parents who come to parenting classes you, the reader of this book, have your own unique situation and previous experiences. You may be a single parent or may be a parent who has a supportive spouse; you might be a parent who does not have a supportive spouse; you might be a male parent or a female parent; or you may simply be a parent who is seeking better insight and understanding. Similarly, the children in your family may consist of one boy, one girl, many boys, many girls, or a combination of boys and girls. So to help reduce the confusion to you the reader by always writing he/she or him/her when referring to either parents or children, I have adopted the pattern in this



book of alternating between him and her or he and she. This is not to imply in latter chapters that only male parents act on way or female parents act another (or vice versa for the children).

This book is constructed in a meaningful manner and not just random topics. The best way to conceptualize the structure of this book is by using a metaphor of how one achieves the task of getting from one place to another with a map. Maps work the same way regardless of being paper-based, using a navigation system, or even on a smartphone. Specifically, there are two things that one must know in order to make the map work effectively: (1) where you are starting and (2) where you want to go. Likewise, this book will follow the same basic principles of first helping you determine where you are starting from and then determining your ultimate destination.

The first three chapters are foundational ones that will help you achieve a proper orientation. If you are the type of person who likes to skim while reading or rushes through an appetizer course to get to the main course or dessert, then I would like to encourage you to fight your impulses and not skip over the first three (3) chapters. Using our map analogy, if you do skip over the first chapters then you may find it challenging (if not impossible) to reach your ultimate destination because you will get lost before you even begin your journey. The subsequent chapters (that is Chapters 4 through 8) are skill-building ones that will be easier to understand once the foundational work is covered.

### **Why the 'Art' of Encouragement?**

The title of this book was heavily debated and considerable energy was put into the word selection. Although there is a chapter (i.e. Chapter 4) that covers the differences and importance between praise versus encouragement, this book actually deals with



encouragement in all chapters. Encouragement is a concept that was first described almost 100 years ago by a psychiatrist named Dr. Alfred Adler. Encouragement is more than just words; it is a mindset that a person has to develop. This book, in its entirety, teaches you how to develop the mindset necessary to be successful as a parent and be able to raise a responsible, self-sufficient child.

The alternate title for this book was *The Power of Encouragement* and was rejected by me because encouragement is more of an art form like dancing or playing music rather than a means to control another person. I have always taught the parents in my classes that as they learn and develop the art of encouragement within themselves, they will notice that the person they end up controlling is the one they see in the mirror every day – not the child who may have been the reason they started taking the class in the first place. Children’s behavior will change in relation to the changes parents make in the way they interact with them and respond to their behavior. This is a journey that started with the selection of this book; however, the journey does not have a specific end. After years of working with children and their families, I find that each day I experience something that helps me further develop the art of encouragement within myself.

### **Some final thoughts before starting**

I hope you find this book helpful in your quest to become the best parent that you can be. I truly believe that any parent who actively seeks out information to improve their parenting skills has already taken the biggest step in becoming a more effective parent. Many parents shy away from seeking out help and guidance either through books or through parenting classes because they feel it is too difficult to address their lack of knowledge and then change the way they interact with their children.



I would like to remind you; however, that sometimes reading a book or attending a parenting class is necessary but not sufficient to solving certain behavior management problems. Sometimes, parents need professional help either with their own behavior and emotional difficulties or help for their child. Parents who are still struggling after reading this book should seek out professional help through a therapist or counselor if they find that some of the challenges they are facing are not addressed by the chapters in this book.

After completing the book if a reader would like additional information, guidance, or tools to help either in the implementation of the strategies contained within, the author can be reached through the company's (i.e., CONNECTED, LLC) website at [www.youareconnected.info](http://www.youareconnected.info).

