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Thank you for downloading your complimentary copy of chapter 3 of *Guiding Motivation*. We hope you enjoy reading it and will want to read the entire book which is full of practical suggestions and ideas, as is Dr. Kathy's style. You can [purchase the book on our shopping cart](#).

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Parents Who Motivate

As a parent, taking on different roles at the right times makes it more likely that children's core needs will be met in healthy ways, their character will be solid, and they'll be motivated in wise directions for healthy goals. This is especially true when communicating that you're on their side and always for them. Let me explain.

Your Key Roles

Parents who thoughtfully and strategically take on each of the four roles I'll explain here will be most successful at motivating children.

Be a Teacher

Children can't do what they don't know how to do. And, as they sometimes tell me, all the telling and yelling won't help them. The best motivational strategies and all the stickers in the world won't increase their motivation if they're legitimately confused and uncertain.

Be a teacher. Explain what you want your children to do. Use vivid verbs and descriptive adjectives. Often learning through contrast helps. Talk about right and accurate ways and wrong and inaccurate ways. Show them what you mean. For example, you could show the difference between complete/incomplete and organized/disorganized to help them understand what you mean.

After you teach and demonstrate, have your children explain what they understand. If you know they get it, hold them accountable to a higher standard. If they are still confused, teach them to ask specific questions so your additional teaching is directed to what they need to know. Let them know they are now accountable for their understanding. **Don't allow them to use not knowing how to do something as an excuse for being unmotivated.**

Have you been telling and yelling lately? When and in what ways can you increase your teaching?

Be a Coach

Were you an athlete? If so, you realize coaching is different from teaching. If you weren't, think about what you've seen at athletic competitions, and you can probably predict why I might recommend you coach in addition to teach.

Even more than teachers, coaches break tasks down into bite-size pieces. They teach, explain, and demonstrate one skill at a time. And, when possible, they allow their athletes to master one skill before adding another. For example, when I coached middle school girls' basketball, beginners needed to learn how to dribble standing still *and then* while moving down the court. They practiced shooting baskets from a standing position before I had them practice shooting after dribbling to the basket. If they were right handed, they mastered right-handed layups before I introduced left-handed layups. (Piano teachers do this, too. Players are usually encouraged to get good at the right hand score before adding the left hand.) No matter what you're teaching children, look for ways to encourage them by breaking down tasks into bite-sized portions.

Good coaches also learn to pay attention to every child and to learn their individual strengths and weaknesses. They individualize their feedback and coaching—having one child practice dribbling while another practices free-throws.

Maybe the thing athletes appreciate most about excellent coaches is that they **reteach without shame or blame**. They understand they're asking their athletes to do something complex and new. They don't expect perfection, or anything approaching it, early in the season. They look for progress.

Coaches that hold these beliefs and demonstrate these attitudes toward children will be especially effective. They're what allow athletes to become a team and children to believe they can please their parents and want to.

To be a parent who motivates children well, don't just teach them how to do something. Coach them in the different elements that make up the whole. Maybe introduce them one at a time so children aren't overwhelmed.

Have you thought of applications to your children? What about "clean your room"? Do you realize how many things are in their room that could be "cleaned"? What about writing an essay? There's spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, paragraph structure and order, writing style, content, and more. Setting the dinner table, finishing homework, taking care of their

sister, ... I think we'd be hard pressed to think of anything that couldn't be broken into manageable pieces. Be a coach and teach them well. Then help them put the pieces together for a successful whole.

How can you begin to implement these ideas about coaching?

Be a Cheerleader

Cheerleaders provide enthusiastic support. Their presence, smiles, and proclamations that athletes can "do it" are significant. But, the best cheerleaders in the world cheering exactly the right cheers at the right time won't help an inept team win a game. The team may not even score. Children need teachers and coaches. Children tell me that these roles give you the right to cheer. They resent parents who cheer, "You can do it! You can do it!" when they don't help them "do it." That makes total sense to me.

After teaching and coaching and while teaching and coaching, be optimistic and encouraging. Be realistic, too. Otherwise you can quickly decrease children's motivation.

Great cheerleaders pay attention to the game's score. They might begin the game cheering "V-I-C-T-O-R-Y!!" but when the team is down by 30 in the fourth quarter, they **change the cheer**. They're still on the sidelines. They still smile and build pyramids. They still cheer, but it might be "Sway to the right, sway to the left, stand up, sit down, fight, fight, fight!"

When I talk with children at my speaking events, they tell me often that it's offensive and upsetting when parents say things like, "You're going to have a great year in math!" when there's no evidence they're more capable than they were the previous year. Tears form as they ask me, "Do you think they'll ever accept me even if I keep earning C's?" Or, more painfully, they ask, "Do you think they'll love me even if I keep earning C's?"

Are there some cheers you need to change?

Be a Referee

There are times when children will need you to be a referee. Just like with any athlete, the more effort you put into teaching and coaching, the less you'll need to referee them. They are human and will undoubtedly forget truth and make mistakes. That's when you can point out they're over the line, out of bounds, and fouling others. You must.

If you don't blow your whistle, they'll continue to make mistakes. If you let them keep repeating the errors, they'll think they're doing things well. They'll resist your refereeing in the future. Be courageous. Be the ref now.

Are your children fouling others or making mistakes you need to point out?

All four roles matter. When you're concerned with motivating children well, you'll move seamlessly in between the roles as your children need you. You'll also want to pay attention to discern which role or roles motivate one child more than another. For example, some children

may prefer that you coach them rather than cheer for them. Watch them. You can even ask them.

Communicating Key Beliefs

No matter what role you're playing at any given time, children benefit when you choose to be optimistic, enthusiastic, and encouraging. Admit it. Wouldn't you rather spend time with and listen to people who exhibit these beliefs? Isn't being motivated in the right direction more likely?

Be Optimistic

Optimism is important when motivating others because of its observation and communication power. When you're optimistic, you expect things to go well. You're oriented to success and expect favorable outcomes. Optimists look first for what's right and then for what's wrong—only if it's necessary.

Optimists communicate joy and hope through smiles, eye contact, welcoming body language, and truth. When optimistic, you don't panic when children spill their milk and make spelling mistakes. And, you don't communicate the expectation they'll repeat these troubles the next day. That's a key point of being optimistic and one that children greatly appreciate. **Just as God's mercies are new every morning, yours should be, too.**

Your optimism also means you'll explain things without resenting their need for the explanation. When you communicate well, you expect your explanations and questions to work. You're positive toward yourself and them because you expect they will "get it." You understand learning new things takes time and mistakes may occur. That doesn't mean they're "bad" or "dumb."

Be Enthusiastic

Children need you to be enthusiastic for them, what they're interested in, what they're doing, who they're becoming, and more. Enthusiasm is defined as "lively interest." It's the opposite of indifference.

Indifference might be one of the saddest things children experience. If you've been indifferent, or they think you've been indifferent, you'll have to earn back their trust. I understand. Busyness, fatigue, your own challenges, constant frustration with your children, and other factors possibly caused you to distance yourself from one or more of your children. These are reasons, but not excuses to continue being indifferent. Have grace for yourself and use the truths here to increase your enthusiasm. I'm grateful you're reading this book and are aware that change is necessary for your children to be motivated for more.

If you drastically change your communication style and suddenly become very interested and involved, children may be suspicious. They may push back and doubt you. Talk about your choice to re-engage as you make gradual changes to be enthusiastically on their side. Don't let your enthusiasm overpower you or them.

Guard yourself to make sure you tell the truth and don't exaggerate your hope for your children. Sometimes it's possible to become too enthusiastic. Your desire that they do well can cause you to make statements that backfire. I hear about this too often from children. This example is from a fifth grader:

"My dad said, 'I know you can earn an A. You'll do it this year.' But, I've never earned more than a B and that was mostly luck. I don't think my dad even knows me. He hasn't been paying attention. Math is really hard for me. I'm going to disappoint him bad this year. I don't know what to do."

On the inside, I think this child is screaming, "Will you not accept me for the B student God created me to be?" This dad needs to change his cheer.

Be Encouraging

If you're like me, you want to spend time with optimistic, enthusiastic people who encourage you. So do your children. If you want to have more influence over them, be an optimist and not a pessimist, be enthusiastic and not indifferent, and be encouraging and not discouraging.

When you're encouraging, children will want to be with you. They'll more regularly seek your opinion and care about your input. They'll admit when they struggle rather than lying and hiding from you.

A reason encouragement is so important is that it's the source of courage. **Encouragement** is defined as giving someone courage. If you **discourage** them, you steal their courage.

Courage is essential.¹ It's related to risk-taking. All learning and attempts at growth take risk. Children who have never taken piano lessons need to be courageous. Children who play soccer for the first time need to be courageous. The first weeks of fourth grade, physics, and marching band all require courage because risks abound.

If you discourage children by always comparing them to others, talking about how hard things might be, talking first about their mistakes, and always using a demeaning tone of voice, they'll not achieve as much as they might have. No courage = no learning.

Children are encouraged by different things so observe carefully. Some are encouraged by more instruction; some by the right cheers. Some are encouraged by parties; some may be overwhelmed by all the attention. Some are encouraged as you look over their shoulder as they practice; some want to call upon you when they perceive they need you.

You're more likely to encourage children when pointing out what they do right than what they do wrong. Or, at least do both. It can depend upon if the subject is new, if they applied themselves when doing their work, and other factors. But, when your goal is to encourage, it's almost always wisest to emphasize strengths.

For instance, if your daughter's graded math paper has "-3" at the top, she might show you after emptying her backpack: "Look mom, I only got 3 wrong!" Imagine if that same paper had "+22" at the top. Now she says, "Look mom, I got 22 right!"

If your son is upset with a grade or performance, **listen as he processes his disappointment. Interact with him. Respond with compassion.** Don't immediately offer solutions. There's definitely a time and place for that. But, when your goal is to encourage him so he won't give up and he'll willingly risk again, you want to talk about strengths first.

When you can, ask him what he is happy about. What did he do well or better than the last time? Maybe he made spelling mistakes in his story, but he remembered to choose vivid adjectives. Maybe he missed the goal when kicking the ball, but he recognizes he ran more without being winded.

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Are you someone who is naturally optimistic, enthusiastic, and encouraging? Keep at it! If you're not, what's keeping you from becoming more optimistic, enthusiastic, and encouraging? Rest, quiet time with God, spending time with optimistic people, choosing to acknowledge and celebrate your own strengths, having fun with your children? Do what it takes. You're worth it and so are your children.
