



The Encouragement Principle

Encouraging parents of children with special needs, from a man who was a child with special needs.

Raising a child with special needs is an overwhelming responsibility. It is taxing physically and emotionally. Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness can take over. Wondering why or how your child is affected can lead to negative feelings toward others, even toward your child. The Encouragement Principle program will encourage you and give you new ideas for how to support your child.

Main Themes

- Acknowledging the feelings and challenges of raising a child with special needs
- Stories from my own upbringing
- Giving your children the freedom to try
- The joy and pride you experience when your child's joy increases

My talk centers on the love, encouragement, and acceptance I experienced from my parents and relatives. But it also talks about the joy and feeling of accomplishment that my parents experienced as I displayed the happiness I felt in my life and the self-confidence and self-esteem that was built.



My parents were willing to let me try anything I expressed interest in (in my case, sports and music) and I was able to build confidence by just trying, finding out for myself whether or not I could do something. It led to my persevering in activities that I failed at initially and eventually succeeded at. It also resulted in a healthy level of self-esteem that helped me in making friends and joining groups of kids in activities at school and in the neighborhood.

I could have easily been held back from physical activities. It would have made sense with my physical disabilities. In fact, my parents were advised to do so by doctors and friends. But they saw the sparkle in my eyes, the determination to try, the joy I had as I played baseball, basketball, or golf with friends. Certainly there were challenges and setbacks, but it did not hold them back from letting me try.

There are young children or adults who don't have the capacity to do what I did. But every child, every human being has the desire and spirit to live life. My challenge/question to parents is – what brings joy and a smile to your child? Encourage them in that direction and you, too, will be encouraged.