

Enhancing Empowerment Tip Sheet

Jacklyn Eding, LLMSW | *Wedgwood Outpatient Therapist*

In a world of uncertainty, it's important for young people to know that they have a voice and can believe in themselves. Empowerment is the act of guiding youth in a matter that encourages their belief in their own abilities and potential for positive growth (International School of Science). Growing empowerment for our youth assists in developing stronger self-esteem, empathy, guidance, and courage to try new things. Strong self-empowerment can also assist youth in learning and growing from challenges and mistakes made along the way. Here are some helpful tips to assist the development of empowerment for your child/children:

Make sure they feel heard and understood.

- Communication is key in any relationship. When a child or adolescent feels their voice is not being heard or valued, it can discourage their confidence to continue to speak up. It is important that the adults around them take the time to stop and listen with the intent to understand rather than to provide immediate guidance, reassurance, or support. Utilize **active listening** (*listen without distractions or thinking of what you're going to say next.*) As well as **reflective communication** (*summarizing the thoughts or problem and reflecting on their emotions*) to assist in allowing for youth to advocate and speak up for themselves.

Allow risk taking.

- It's important to keep children safe, however, by allowing our youth and adolescents to explore their environment independently fosters a strong sense of self-confidence. Provide accurate supervision and guidance while also allowing for independent choices and taking risks. Try to avoid immediately stepping in, for example, when a child is attempting to slide the big slide, or when your teenager is behind the wheel for their first driving lesson (*yes, this one can be hard but try your best!*)

Teach and model appropriate personal boundaries.

- It's important that children and youth know their personal boundaries from an early age and have complete body autonomy. Start teaching as well as showing your children body safety, consent, emotional safety and psychological safety from a young age. It's important for children and youth to know that they have a right to be protected and can use their voice when they feel uncomfortable.

Model appropriate expressions of feelings and emotions

- Youth and adolescents learn how to interact with others and process their emotions through observing main care takers in their lives. By allowing children to witness a healthy expression of both positive emotions such as happiness and joy, as well as challenging emotions, such as fear and anger, children learn that emotions and feelings are beneficial and can be healthy to express. Teaching children to express how they feel clearly through the utilization of a feelings chart, statements such as "I feel ___ because ___" and communicating needs clearly, allows for better conflict resolution, communication, and empowerment in teenage years and in adulthood.

Provide encouragement and reassurance.

- Encourage perseverance and allow for children and adolescents to know that it's okay to fail, as long as they get back up and try again. Encourage them to try their best in every situation and reassure them that not everything in life has to come easy, but that tough situations can be achieved. Provide praise in both times of success and failure, allowing for youth to understand that it is not the act of succeeding that is most important, but the act of persevering and learning through successes as well as challenges and mistakes.