



# **Encouragement & Reinforcement**

The Penny Jar Approach...

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Communicating encouragement and reinforcement effectively can strengthen trust, motivation, and emotional safety in any relationship, whether with a partner, child, friend, or colleague.

Encouragement and reinforcement strengthen a relationship by creating a climate of emotional safety, support, and connection. When partners acknowledge each other's efforts—rather than focusing only on mistakes—they promote a sense of being seen and valued.

Productive reinforcement helps partners notice and appreciate what *is* working, which increases the likelihood of those healthy behaviors continuing. Encouragement also deepens trust and teamwork by signaling, “We’re on the same side.”

Over time, making these deposits can contribute towards cultivating a positive feedback loop which builds resilience, warmth, and a stronger foundation for navigating conflict and growth together.

Several suggestions for you to consider have been included along with the **Penny Jar** approach. A strategy that enables partners with a process to recognize each other for those small efforts that are often overlooked although when you add them up – mean a lot!

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## Suggestions:

### Be Specific & Intentional

- **Name the exact behavior or effort** you’re encouraging. Specificity makes encouragement feel authentic and reinforces the desired behavior.
  - **Reinforce capabilities** by linking actions with emotional connection—this helps people internalize their strengths.
  - **Try this:** “Catch them doing it right!” Make it a habit to recognize healthy and productive behavior as it happens.
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### Focus on Effort Over Outcome

- **Recognize persistence, learning, and growth** rather than only success.
- **Practice curiosity** to draw out self-reflection:
  - *“How did you make that happen?”*
  - *“What did you learn about yourself?”*

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## Tailor Encouragement

- **Mirror or match the moment.** Adapt your message to fit the person's emotional state—meet them where they are.
  - **Know your role.** Ask how you can best support them:
    - “*How can I support you?*”
    - “*What type of encouragement do you prefer?*”
  - **Remember:** It's not about being overly positive, it's about being *effective* in how others feel seen and appreciated.
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## Use a Variety of Methods

- **Verbal**
    - Say it when you see it.
    - Integrate encouraging language into daily conversation to build comfort and fluency.
  - **Written**
    - Write it down—make your recognition tangible.
    - Use methods like a *gratitude jar*, *whiteboard notes*, or *sticky notes* for lasting impact.
  - **Non-verbal**
    - Use **eye contact and a warm smile** to acknowledge others.
    - **Encourage through physical contact** when appropriate: a hug, high five, or hand on the shoulder.
  - **Digital**
    - Send a thoughtful text message recognizing someone's effort or contribution.
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## Listen First, Act Second

- **People feel most encouraged when they feel heard.**

- Practice active listening: nod, reflect back what you hear, and validate their experience before offering support.
  - **Practice the following 3 steps.**
    - Listen + Understand + Validate
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## **Penny Jar Approach:**

The Penny Jar approach encourages and promotes not just feel-good moments, but a culture of intentional connection, emotional safety, and fosters vulnerability. It is intended to **shift your focus. Cultivate gratitude. Strengthen your connection.**

This exercise is designed to help partners shift their attention **from what their partner is *not* doing to what their partner *is* doing.** The goal is to cultivate a healthier relationship environment by:

- Reinforcing positive behaviors.
- Encouraging gratitude and appreciation.
- Creating a simple habit of acknowledgment—both in the moment and after the fact.

Think of it as making regular deposits into your **relationship Penny Jar**—small gestures that build trust, tolerance, patience, and connection over time.

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## **How It Works:**

### **Step 1: Create Your "Relationship Penny Jar"**

- Find a container (a bowl, jar, or shoebox).
- Label it **“Relationship Penny Jar.”**

### **Step 2: Start Noticing**

- Throughout the day or week, pay attention to small things your partner does that you appreciate.
- These can be big or small, what matters is that you **notice**.

### **Examples:**

- They unloaded the dishwasher.
- Picked up after the dog.
- Sent a thoughtful text.
- Helped fix a flat tire.
- Finished the laundry.
- Changed the toilet paper.

### Step 3: Document and Deposit

- Write down your moment of gratitude on a sticky note or scratch paper.
- Drop it into the Penny Jar.
- Say it aloud if you'd like AND make the physical deposit.

**IMPORTANT:** The act of *documenting* builds awareness of how often your partner shows up for you. It also demonstrates – “I’m watching and I see you.”

### Step 4: Share Your Deposits

- Pick a cadence, i.e., once a week, once a month, to sit down together.
- Randomly pull-out notes and read them to one another.
- No need to read only your own notes—just share what's in the Penny Jar.

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## Why It Matters?

Healthy relationships need a **positive-to-negative interaction ratio**. Research (Gottman Ratio, Losada Ratio) suggests that if positive interactions don’t significantly outweigh negative ones, the emotional tone of the relationship suffers.

### Making “deposits” reinforces the good.

This helps:

- Strengthen emotional connection.
- Shift focus from criticism to appreciation.
- Build a habit of expressing gratitude.
- Make your partner feel seen and valued.

**REMINDER:** It’s not about grand gestures. Think *pennies*, not \$100 bills. Many small deposits add up.

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## How Many Deposits Should We Make?

As many as you genuinely can! The more often you notice and acknowledge, the more you'll shift your awareness from what's *missing* to what's *present*.

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### Example:

- Your partner cleans up dog vomit.
    - You notice it, feel thankful you didn't have to do it—and write:
      - “Thank you for taking care of the mess. I noticed, and I appreciate it!”
  - Drop it in the jar.
    - Later, when you read it aloud, your partner might say:
      - “I didn't think you noticed those things.”
  - That's the power of this practice.
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## What If My Partner Doesn't Participate?

That's okay. Start with yourself.

This exercise is just as much about **retraining your focus** as it is about mutual exchange. Practicing gratitude often leads to a shift in how we perceive others—and over time, can encourage reciprocal behavior.

Be patient. Be consistent. Be genuine.

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Let your **Relationship Penny Jar** become a visible symbol of the unseen work, care, and love that flows between you every day