

Helping You Navigate Your Journey Through Parenting

Feast On THIS!



BY KIM DeMARCHI

No matter what holiday you celebrate, November and December usually involve a lot of family togetherness and a lot of feasting! Instead of overeating this

holiday season, I'm suggesting we all feed our hungry hearts with genuine connection to others. We know that we nourish our bodies and our families' bodies by cooking and eating healthy food. Who and how do we nurture our souls? Have an Encouragement Feast!

Encouragement Feasts are a time when family members (or classmates, or members on a team, or colleagues) take turns saying positive things about each other and to each other. Encouragement Feasts helps us teach our children values by acknowledging progress, growth, and improvement, as well as recognizing the small kindnesses and acts that build character. Encouragement Feasts can be done anytime... to kick off family meetings, to celebrate birthdays, before big events like a test, a performance, or a game, or just anytime you feel like connecting or someone needs their spirits lifted.

How Do You Hold an Encouragement Feast?

The basic process to perform an Encouragement Feast in your family is this:

1. One person is "it", and can sit or stand in the center of the group. We just sit circular and do it.
2. Each member of the group takes turns telling the person "it", "What I really love, like, admire, respect or appreciate about

you is _____." The "it" person takes in what the others are sharing, and says something to the effect of "Thank you" after each encouragement.

3. After everyone in the group has shared, the "it" person says, "What I love about myself is _____."
4. Then another person becomes "it" until everyone has had a turn being "it".

Encouragement Feasts need zero preparations, only take a few seconds each, and in a matter of minutes, each person has received some loving, uplifting words and has encouraged others. The energy and love is so evident and there's zero cleanup! Everyone will be full and nourished. You can have an Encouragement Feast as often as you want and need! It isn't possible to overindulge on these feasts! Just let it flow and don't worry about the outcome or any initial resistance. Kids will develop their encouraging statements over time. Work on modeling sincere encouragement and building your own vocabulary of encouraging phrases rather than using praise during the Encouragement Feast. Praise can feel empty and over-the-top. Try to avoid praising statements such as, "You're the best soccer player ever," "You're such a good boy," or "You are so smart."

Here are some examples of encouraging phrases we have used:

- *What I love about you is how affectionate and loving you are.*
- *What I really appreciate about you is that you make sweet cards for me because you know that means the most to me.*
- *What I like about you is how much fun you have putting together creative outfits.*
- *What I love about you is that you put in a lot of effort when you want to learn something new, like you did with basketball this week.*
- *What I value about you is how you look out for your friends and make sure no one feels left out.*
- *What I love about you is how you made friends with someone who was new at school this week.*
- *What I admire about you is you will stand up for what you believe, without being judgmental of others.*
- *What I love about you is how you stayed enthusiastic when your team was behind, and you kept playing hard.*
- *What I love about you is how you pass the ball so others get a chance to take a shot.*
- *What I appreciate about you is that you help your sister with her math when she doesn't understand it.*
- *What I love about you is how you asked Grandma if you could carry her bags to her car for her. That was really considerate and helped her out a lot.*
- *One of the many things that I appreciate about you is the way you acknowledge when you make a mistake, and you do a make-up.*
- *What I love about you is that you give goodnight hugs every night. That really made me feel good.*
- *What I love about you is that you told your brother when you were upset with him so you could work it out. That was really cool.*



- *One of the many things that I admire about you is how you go to bed early and sleep when you know you're tired. You take good care of yourself!*

If the idea of an Encouragement Feast sounds interesting for you and your family, what better time to start it... the holidays! You certainly don't need me to add one more thing to your crazy December agenda, but the more full and connected you feel inside, body and soul, the less you'll need or want to pursue the holiday frenzy. My immediate family and I have been doing Encouragement Feasts for years. It's never too late to start and is so delicious! You'll go back for more, trust me!

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She also blogs twice a month for Knowledge Universe's Kindercare online community. Kim's goal for you is to help reduce conflict, foster mutual respect, and create deeper communication and connections with your loved ones. She can be reached through www.EmpoweredParenting.com.