

Disability Campaign.org

Encouraging Words for People Affected by Disability



Photo: Joni encourages a woman in a wheelchair and a woman at the Joni and Friends Family Retreat (Joni and Friends).

People with disabilities face much discouragement throughout their lives. Whether it's news of a terrible diagnosis, lack of understanding, or the reality of the day-to-day routines of caregiving, there are many reasons why someone affected by a disability needs your encouragement.

As Joni Eareckson Tada says, “Every day we are using words that either build people up or tear them down.” When seeking to encourage a person with a disability, do not simply say something “nice” because they have a disability. Tailor your words to their needs and avoid classic clichés such as, “things will get better” or “good job!” Sometimes, you may not know what to say, but that doesn't mean you cannot relate to a person's frustrations or joys.

Encouraging quotes from others:

Let these quotes inspire you to verbally encourage someone with a disability, special needs, or chronic illness.

- “Perseverance is not a long race. It is many short races one after another.”
– Walter Elliott
- “Just because a man lacks the use of his eyes doesn't mean he lacks vision.”
– Stevie Wonder

- “Your living is determined not so much by what life brings to you ... as by the attitude you bring to life.” – John Homer Mills
- “Go as far as you can see; when you get there, you’ll be able to see further.” – Thomas Carlyle
- “Children remind us to treasure the smallest of gifts, even in the most difficult times.” – Allen Klein
- “The best we can hope for in this life is a knothole peek at the shining realities ahead. Yet a glimpse is enough. It’s enough to convince our hearts that whatever sufferings and sorrows currently assail us aren’t worthy of comparison to that which waits over the horizon.” – Joni Eareckson Tada

Encouraging words for you to say:

When praising someone affected by a disability, be specific. Acknowledge their accomplishments and tell them how they’ve inspired you. Here are some examples:

- “I truly admire the way you patiently repeat instructions to your child.”
- “The way in which you handled your bad medical report helped me keep my calm when I lost my job.”
- “You’ve come far with your physical therapy; I can tell you’re trying very hard to regain mobility in your arm and I know that must take a lot of effort.”
- “I am honored to be your friend and I value our friendship.”



Photo: Kevin Grow (left) and Thaddeus Young of the Philadelphia 76ers (right). (Ron Cortes/Philadelphia Inquirer/MCT).

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