



## INSPIRE GESTURE

To inspire through motivation, encouragement or influence, is a gesture that is essential for children to recognize their potential and believe in possibilities in their lives and future.

Think back to when you were a child. Do you recall a glimmering moment when your spirit soared in response to words an adult said to you? When their words elevated your sense of self and inspired you to do something big?

Children who have witnessed violence and experienced traumatic stress aren't always inspired in the same way. They can become negative, often have a low sense of self-worth, expect to be unsuccessful, and fail to foresee a positive future.

But caring adults can help children reverse this negative response to toxic stress. You can help inspire and build resiliency in children by identifying their strengths and natural talents and by connecting them to programs that help develop self-confidence.

In this section, we offer inspiration to you as teachers, advocates, and caregivers to first reach out to children and listen, to set examples of positive thinking, and to encourage them to try new things.

Being a consistently caring adult in the life of a child has been proven to help heal their brains and bodies. So inspire the children in your life, and give them their own glimmering moments to remember.

See the [short films](#) inspired by real stories. Children can be inspired when we show how much we care, how we want to connect with them, and how much their voice really matters.

### Age-Related Tips

Help to inspire infants and toddlers, elementary and middle school children, and teens by encouraging learning and creativity, positive thinking and setting goals.

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#### **Infants & Toddlers**

Inspire younger children by first establishing routines so they feel in control of their world and free to explore, play, grow, and learn. Then encourage learning and creativity.

- Create space and opportunities for them to new skills and tasks.
- Provide opportunities for unstructured play or make believe and creative activities such as art projects, modeling clay, and building blocks.
- Read to children of all ages to help expand their sense of the world.

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#### **Elementary/Middle School**

Inspire students at this age by helping them develop positive mindsets, encouraging them to anticipate success, and nurturing their curiosity and creativity.

#### **Encourage Positive Thinking and Setting Goals**



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- Encourage children to think positively and to try to master tasks they're struggling with.
- Help children develop strategies to bring them closer to their short and long-term goals and success.
- Break down difficult tasks into manageable steps to help them feel safe enough to experiment, take risks, and to fail.

### **Encourage Learning and Creativity**

- Read to and with children to help expand their sense of the world.
- Nurture curiosity and creativity by exposing kids to a range of artistic (dressing up, pretend play, and music) and athletic activities. Provide them with toys and activities that both challenge them and allow them to succeed.
- Engage them in conversations about adults they look up to and why (e.g. celebrities, sports stars, the President, etc.).

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### **Teens**

Inspire teens by encouraging them to do things outside their comfort zone. Provide role models and encourage goal setting.

### **Encourage Positive Thinking and Setting Goals**

- Encourage teens to try new things and to take part in healthy risk-taking. Suggest activities that allow them to practice skills and feel good about themselves.
- Ask teens who their role models are and why and help them focus on what qualities they admire. Be a positive role model yourself. When possible, create opportunities for them to meet or work with adults in areas that interest them.
- Explore their future goals and engage them in short and long-term goal setting — establish realistic, achievable goals. Provide opportunities for increasingly challenging tasks.

### **Environment-Related Tips**

Whether at school, in the community, in a health care setting, or at home, adults can help children to be inspired and to inspire others.

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### **At School**

Demonstrate a belief in your students' potential, create a climate of achievement by setting high standards and expectations for them, and set a positive example as a role model through the ways you approach tasks and relationships. Wherever you are working with children also remember to:

- Help children identify their natural talents or abilities and use them in the classroom.
- Create opportunities for children to learn about different career paths and take on leadership roles in and outside of the classroom.
- Connect children to after-school programs such as theater, dance, sports and opportunities to join in community service.
- Inquire about their friend networks and help them identify friends that make them feel happy and confident.



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## **In The Community**

Community members working with children at scout meetings, free-play, neighborhood activities, therapy sessions, and so forth can be a source of inspiration for children of all ages.

- Provide experiences that focus on cooperation rather than competition and opportunities to experience success or to develop and practice their leadership skills.
- Encourage children to spend time with other caring adults who can act as role models.
- Support children's abilities to speak up when things go wrong or when they're victimized. Help them become advocates for change.

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## **In Health Care Settings**

In a hospital clinic, in a counselor's office, or during therapy sessions, health care professionals can help to inspire children as providers and confidantes.

- Ask all children about their dreams and aspirations.
- Expose them to what you do. Talk to kids about what you like about being a health care provider.

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## **At Home**

Help children see the connections between everyday tasks and long-term goals. Show the "why" behind the mundane.

- Talk to children about how you or other adults they look up to choose their careers. Children might dream of being a pop singer or an astronaut. Don't try to lower their expectations.
- Encourage children to believe that anything is possible and help them set goals to realize their dreams.

## **Why it Works**

Children who have experienced violence and traumatic stress can become negative, expect to be unsuccessful, have a low sense of self-worth, and fail to foresee a positive future for themselves. Caring adults can reverse children's negative responses and perceptions by helping them develop strong executive function and self-regulation skills.

Inspiration comes from a willingness to try to learn new things in a positive and safe environment. Inspire children by fostering a nurturing environment that motivates them to explore, partner with them to recognize their strengths and talents, and be a role model for positive thinking.

All five gestures are ways to inspire children of all ages. To help inspire keep in mind:

- Helping children identify their strengths and natural talents builds resilience to adversity. Connect them with programs to help them develop a sense of mastery and competence.



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- Children who believe in their own capacity to guide their future are more likely to adapt positively to adversity.<sup>1</sup> Providing children with the tools and opportunities to succeed urges them to be more willing to take on new challenges.
- Being involved in extracurricular activities helps children feel less isolated and creates healthy relationships with peers and other supportive adults.<sup>2</sup>

Remind other colleagues and adults to keep consistently inspiring with these recommendations:

1. Partner with children to identify their strengths and talents.
2. Create a safe environment that encourages children to be creative, learn, and explore.
3. Demonstrate examples of positive thinking.
4. Encourage them to try new things and set goals.
5. Motivate, influence, and connect them to programs that help develop self-confidence.

## **References**

<sup>1</sup> National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2015). Supportive Relationships and Active Skill-Building Strengthen the Foundations of Resilience: Working Paper 13. <http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu>.

<sup>2</sup> Priscilla M.D. Little, Christopher Wimer, Heather B. Weiss, Harvard Family Research Project (2008) After School Programs in the 21st Century: Their Potential and What it Takes to Achieve It. Retrieved from: <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/publications-series/issues-and-opportunities-in-out-of-school-time-evaluation/after-school-programs-in-the-21st-century-their-potential-and-what-it-takes-to-achieve-it>.

[Activate Your Community](#)

[Taking Care of Yourself](#)