

PRAISE & ENCOURAGEMENT

Quotes

Children have an intrinsic desire to learn. Praise and manipulation can only serve to stifle that natural motivation and replace it with blind conformity, a mechanical work style, or open defiance toward authority.

– Randy Hirtz and Amy Driscoll, *Young Children*, 1988

In many cases, the effects of praising kids can be just as dismal as the effects of giving them other sorts of goodies.

– Alfie Kohn, *Unconditional Parenting*, 2005

Notes

Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes. Kohn strongly suggested that adults review their use of praising children. He offered four things adults can do to properly utilize praise. (We'll explore these in more depth in the "Suggestions" section that follows). Kohn's advice,

- 1) Don't praise people, only what people do,
- 2) Make praise as specific as possible,
- 3) Avoid phony praise,
- 4) Avoid praise that sets up competition.

Are we raising a generation of "praise junkies?" Are our children so hooked on receiving toys, stickers, certificates, praise, and other goodies that they are no longer intrinsically motivated? Sometimes it appears that many of our children "expect" a positive reinforcement every time they do something good. Our goal is to help young people become more responsible and to do the right thing. Let's hope Joanie helps the elderly lady down the street because she knows it is the right thing to do, not because she hopes to get money or praise for doing it. Let's not eliminate praise, let's just be more selective in its use.

Recommended Resources

- Every Child Has A Gift
- The Pursuit of Happiness
- 200 Ways to Raise a Boy's Emotional Intelligence
- 200 Ways to Raise a Girl's Self-Esteem



PRAISE & ENCOURAGEMENT

Strategies

1. When you praise, make sure it is sincere. Don't use phony praise. Everyone, even little children, know phony praise when they hear it.
2. Limit your praise. If you are constantly praising a child, it can lose its effectiveness. A child who is "flooded" with praise may get to a point when he/she doesn't hear you anymore or the child may get an inflated self-esteem.
3. Reverse the praise. Instead of saying, "I'm proud of you for getting an A in math, say, "You must be proud of yourself for getting an A in math."
4. Try to make your praise as private as possible. Children are very conscious of which children are getting the most praise at home or in the classroom. Private praise can eliminate jealousy and competition. Middle school teachers learned long ago that one of the worse things they can do to a middle school student is to praise him in front of his classmates. To many students this can be embarrassing and they believe it isn't "cool" to be praised by a teacher.
5. Make your praise specific. Instead of saying, "Jasmine, you are a good artist," say, "Jasmine, you did a great job selecting colors for the background." People tend to remember specific praise more than general praise.
6. Give occasional praise with no strings attached. A father might say to his daughter, "I'm so proud to have you as my daughter." A teacher could say, "Evelyn, I enjoy having you in my class."
7. Too much praise can limit creativity and risk taking. Studies have found when students receive a lot of praise they reach a point where they will not do extra work, take risks, or try harder because if they are unsuccessful, they believe they won't get the praise they desire.
8. Do not always praise results, praise effort. "Whew, Mindy, you worked up a good sweat completing that chore."
9. Be especially careful using praise with children who have Oppositional Defiant Disorder. These children do not like to be controlled or manipulated by people in positions of authority. If you praise, especially in front of peers, their behavior may actually get worse.
10. Spontaneous praise is great. Kids love getting genuine praise when least expecting it.
11. When a child completes a chore or finishes his school work, instead of praising him, ask him questions about his work. "Alex, how do you feel about this project? Do you like the results? Would you do any thing different the next time?" Children enjoy answering these questions. It lets the child know that you are truly interested in his actions.
12. Consider acting like a play-by-play sports announcer while observing your children. Instead of praising Brad for playing nicely with his little sister, say, "Brad, I noticed you shared your truck with Millie. Now, you are letting her go first in the ball toss." Comments like these let the child know that you are aware of his kind actions. Although you are not praising Brad, he does feel good about your comments.
13. Instead of relying on verbal praise, try writing. Most children will tell you they love written notes of praise better than the spoken word.
14. Parents must never forget about giving their children unconditional love. Children need to know that they are more important than their accomplishments. During the past ten years or so I've asked over a thousand third, fourth, and fifth graders this question: Which of these two statements would you prefer to hear your parents say more often....."I love you" or "I'm proud of you?" Over 75% of the children preferred to hear I love you!