

Using Praise: A Positive Parenting Skill

Praise is a powerful tool that parents can use to encourage and reinforce their child's positive behaviors. Research indicates that positive reinforcement, like praise, is more effective than punishment. This guide outlines strategies for effectively using praise to its fullest potential. By understanding and applying these praise techniques, parents can effectively encourage positive behavior in their children, fostering a more supportive and encouraging environment.

Recognize Positive Behavior

It's natural to pay more attention to unwanted behaviors, but it's important to notice and praise positive behaviors too. Sometimes, positive behavior can be as simple as not engaging in a negative action (e.g., talking calmly with a sibling instead of arguing). Make an effort to acknowledge your child's good behaviors, even if they seem routine.

Examples:

- "You were really good during dinner."
- "Thank you for getting along with your brother."

Start with Small Steps

What might seem like an easy goal for adults can be a significant achievement for children. Instead of expecting perfect behavior all day, praise your child for smaller, manageable steps, such as following the rules for a short period. Focus on progress toward the goal rather than the final outcome.

Examples:

- Good job bringing home your homework."
- "Thank you for remembering to start your chores."

Praise Effort, Not Just Results

Many factors in life are beyond our control. Your child might study diligently and still not achieve the desired grade. By praising the effort they put into studying, you reinforce behaviors that are within their control, which can lead to better outcomes in the future.

Examples:

- “You’ve been doing such a good job studying—I’m sorry you didn’t get the grade you wanted.”
- “I’m proud of you for trying out for the swim team. It’s great that you tried, even if you didn’t make it.”

Ignore Minor Misbehaviors

When children don't receive positive attention, they might act out to gain negative attention. If a misbehavior isn't dangerous or destructive, try ignoring it. Once the unwanted behavior stops, wait a moment and then praise your child for something positive they are doing.

Examples:

- After your child stops whining, say, “Thank you for speaking to me calmly.”

Be Specific with Your Praise

When you praise your child, be specific about what behavior you are praising. This helps them understand exactly what they did well and encourages them to repeat that behavior.

Examples:

- Instead of saying, “Good job,” try, “Good job cleaning up your toys without being asked.”
- Instead of “Well done,” say, “Well done on sharing your toys with your sister.”

Be Consistent

Just like eating one healthy meal won't make you fit, praising your child once won't instantly change their behavior. Regular, consistent praise helps reinforce and build the positive behaviors you want to see.

Examples:

- Make it a habit to find moments throughout the day to praise your child for their efforts and accomplishments.

Be Genuine

Children can tell when praise is not sincere. Make sure your praise is genuine and deserved to build trust and reinforce positive behavior effectively.

Examples:

- Offer praise for genuine efforts and achievements rather than exaggerating accomplishments.
- Avoid empty praise like “You’re the best!” unless it’s truly warranted.

Balance Praise and Constructive Feedback

While praise is important, balancing it with constructive feedback helps children understand areas where they can improve without feeling discouraged.

Examples:

- “You did a great job on your math test! Let’s work together on the problems you found difficult.”
- “I love how you cleaned your room! Next time, let’s remember to also dust the shelves.”