



NHS Fife Department of Psychology

Praising Your Child

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Praising Your Child

All behaviour both children and adults display is learned and can be changed. Behavioral difficulties, which all children experience from time to time, are not the result of a bad child or an inadequate parent, but the complex interplay of the reactions between parents and children. Successful parenting occurs when parents are sensitive to the temperament, needs and cues from the child and adjust the way that they manage the child accordingly. It is about understanding the needs of the child, and how to respond to these needs in a way that will promote the emotional, social and behavioral development of the child.

One of the most important elements of positive parenting, is understanding the 'attention rule'. Basically this rule means that children will do whatever it takes to get the attention they need from others (especially their parents). Ideally they will get positive attention (eg. praise and encouragement for appropriate behaviour), however, if they do not receive attention for good behaviour, the child will also work hard for negative attention (such as criticism or getting in to trouble) by misbehaving. It often confuses parents that children persist with behaviour that keeps getting them into trouble, and they don't understand why their children are not learning to stop. What parents need to understand is that the child has actually learned a way to make sure that they get a lot of attention, and so long as they are getting attention (whether its good or bad), the behaviour won't stop.

Thus one of the challenges for parents is learning how to give attention to encourage more of the behaviour that they want to see, how to give less attention to the behaviour they don't want to see, and how to still discipline children effectively without giving lots of attention.

The most important area to start, however, is not with discipline. Rather, its about focusing on encouraging children to display behaviour that you want to see more of, and this involves focusing attention on these positive behaviors (not the misbehaviour). One of the most effective ways to encourage behaviour is through the use of praise.

Points to Remember when praising a child

1. Establish eye contact, move close, and smile at your child
2. Label the behaviour and be specific with praise
3. Praise with sincerity and enthusiasm and in a variety of ways. Make a big deal out of it
4. Praise immediately following the desired behaviour
5. Combine verbal praise with physical affection
6. Don't wait for behaviour to be perfect before praising (praise steps in the right direction). Praise all the positive behaviours that occur, if you don't they won't be repeated.
7. Catch your child being good!
8. Praise your child in front of other people
9. Use praise consistently, especially when the child is first learning a new behaviour, or working on a behaviour that is difficult for them. Target a specific behaviour and keep working on it.
10. Don't combine praise with a criticism (the child will only remember what they did wrong)

Suggestions for Praise

Remember and use specific labeled praise. Make it clear to the child what they have done to earn your praise and attention.

1. "You do a good job of...."
2. "You have improved in...."
3. "I like it when you...."
4. "Good idea for...."
5. "Good for you for...."
6. "You've done a good job of...."
7. "See how _____ has improved in...."
8. "You're doing very well"
9. "Look how well he/she did...."
10. "That's a perfect way of...."
11. "Wow, what a wonderful job you've done of...."
12. "That's correct that's the correct way to...."
13. "I'm so happy you...."
14. "It really pleases me when you...."
15. "You're such a big girl for...."
16. "Good boy for...."
17. "Thank you for...."
18. "What a nice job of...."
19. "Hey, you are really sharp, you...."
20. "That's great, it really looks like...."
21. "You're doing just what Mummy wants you to do...."
22. "My! That _____ was so nice"
23. "That's very nice (or good) for...."
24. "Mummy's very proud of you for...."
25. "Beautiful! Fine! Great! Gorgeous! Tremendous!"

Physical rewards

26. Pat arm, shoulder
27. Hug
28. Rub head
29. Squeeze arm or waist
30. Give a kiss

Examples of Behaviours to Praise

1. Sharing
2. Talking nicely
3. Complying to requests
4. Eating fruit and vegetables
5. Going to bed first time asked
6. Playing quietly
7. Solving a problem
8. Turning down the television
9. Doing chores
10. Coming home from school on time
11. Getting up in the morning
12. Going out all night without wetting
13. Making bed
14. Picking up clothes
15. Putting away toys
16. Walking slowly
17. Doing homework
18. Talking politely
19. Listening

Put it Into Practice

Have a go at praising your child this week. Praise should be focused on all aspects of your child's behaviour (not simply related to their eating), and should include routine behaviours, like brushing teeth and getting ready for school, not just enormous achievements (like outstanding results on a test). Keep a track of what you praise your child for and how your child responds to the praise. Aim for 15-20 praises a day!!

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