

Handout for session 1: How to Make Praise More Effective

Praise is an important way to let our children know how much we appreciate their efforts. When children receive praise and feel appreciated, they are more motivated to work hard. The average mother praises her child about once every 90 minutes. The majority of parents are making critical statements much more frequently than this. Strive to use praise and interact positively with your child 4 times for every criticism or punishment you use. The most effective parents are very liberal in their use of praise.

ADVANTAGES:

- Causes behaviour to increase
- Helps to develop healthy self esteem
- Helps children know what you like
- Children love being the center of positive attention from their parents
- Kids will want to spend more time with you
- Frequent praise increases the effectiveness of other things you do as a parent.

HOW TO USE:

1. Use a *sincere, enthusiastic* tone of voice. Make sure your child knows you are thrilled with what they are doing.
2. Be specific. Let your child know exactly what you like about what they are doing.
3. Use none verbal signs of approval. The effectiveness of praise can be doubled by adding a smile, a pat on the back, tussling the child's hair, a hug or a high five.
4. Use praise *immediately*. Praise is much more effective if used immediately.
5. Praise is more powerful if it is used frequently. This is especially true when children are learning new behavior.

When we want children to learn a new behavior we should praise it every time it occurs. Overtime we can praise less often as the new behavior becomes a habit. We should never eliminate praise or appreciation completely with our children or our partners. Behavior that is ignored completely or not reinforced in some other way will stop being used.

There are three types of praise that have been shown to be particularly effective in helping children to be more cooperative:

- That was very smart or clever
- I know you can do it
- You are important to me (or to our group) because...

You do not have to use these exact same words. People tend to get into habits with how they do things. It is a good idea to experiment with different ways of giving praise, as it will have more impact if we say it differently.