

Talking Matters

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Helping your child to reach their potential



Using praise effectively

Praise and encouragement is often used by adults when they want to motivate children to do things, learn new skills or develop more confidence. Are there right and wrong ways to praise children? Is praising children always a useful thing to do?

Babies do things for the sheer enjoyment of exploring and learning through their senses. As children get older they learn that what they do gets a reaction from adults. Adults in turn want to motivate children to do certain things and so often use praise, rewards and encouragement. Some children are more dependent on praise from adults, while others are more independent and self-directed.



We want to use praise in a way that helps children learn the value of effort and completion of tasks rather than seeking to please adults. This helps them learn to be self-motivated. Praise is most effective when adults are careful to praise specifically and to focus effort and achievement rather than on giving approval. When children seek approval they may give up more easily when things get difficult.

Effective praise is:

- Specific “Well done for putting all your toys away”.
- Focused on effort “You worked very hard to finish that puzzle”.
- Acknowledging of your child’s feelings “You’re excited about being in the concert”.
- Focused on progress “You five did more lines than last time”



Ineffective praise is:

- General “Good boy”
- Focused on outcome rather than effort “You finished first”
- Evaluating children “You’re a good singer”.
- Comparing children “Look at how your brother did it”

Using praise effectively can help children learn to focus on effort and working to complete tasks and to keep on trying when things are difficult.