

The Power of Praise

Every day kids should get messages from parents that they are good and loved. These messages come in lots of different forms, like parents saying “I love you”, “You’re so awesome”, or “Man, it’s cool to be your dad.” When kids get the message that they are loved and seen as good through their parents’ eyes, they feel better about themselves and it strengthens the parent-child bond.

Kids need love and support *every day* as part of their regular routine.

Getting the Most Out of Praise:

Parents can also make sure we are teaching kids behaviors that they like and want to encourage with the messages that they send. This happens through the praise parents use when kids show good behavior. To get the most out of praise, it should:

- ***Be specific.*** Statements like “Wow,” or “Way to go” are nice, but they don’t really make it clear to kids what they did to get such a reaction. The more specific we are the easier it is for kids to learn what parents want to see. This is really true for kids that might be having a hard time following rules or showing good behavior.
- ***Be excited and enthusiastic.*** To help kids notice the praise, parents should show excitement with their voice and body. A flat “good job” is very different to a kid than excited, “Way to go! You listened right away!” By getting excited, parents shown kids how much it means to them that the good behavior happened. It also helps kids notice the praise easier, because it sounds different than just regular words.
- ***Be immediate.*** The quicker parents can give positive, enthusiastic praise after the behavior they like, the easier it is for kids to put 2 and 2 together. Sure, as kids get older, they can do a better job remembering what they did and linking praise back to that. But, for young kids the longer parents wait to praise the harder it is for them to learn from it. Parents should “catch their child being good” and praise right away.

When kids misbehave a lot, it can be hard for parents to think about what to praise. Or, they think that praise can’t really solve the problem. But, if parents can think about what they want their child to do instead of misbehaving, then they know what to praise! Here are some examples:

“Bad” Behavior

- Hitting other kids
- Running off in stores
- Being mean to the dog

“Good” Opposite Behavior

- Playing nicely
- Walking with parent
- Touching the dog gently

The more kids hear about the good behavior, the less they may do the bad behavior. Plus, it feels much better for both parents and kids to be hearing more about good behavior.

Please note that resources such as this are intended to offer guidance and suggestions. However, no claim is made that the information provided is appropriate for any specific child or family. Many families will find this information helpful and sufficient for addressing child rearing issues. Others will not. Parents are encouraged to talk with their child's pediatrician or seek help from a mental health professional if needed.

Prepping for Success

On the left, make a list of problem behaviors. Be as clear as possible. For example, instead of just writing “tantrums,” write down exactly what your child does when s/he tantrums (e.g., cries, drops to the ground, runs off). Then, on the right, write down positive behaviors you wish to see instead. Once this has been done, focus on praise and physical positives (e.g., hugs, high-fives) when the positive behavior happens.

Misbehavior

Behavior that is wanted

Back-talk—swearing, arguing, saying, “No, I don’t want to!”	Using nice words, stating ideas in a calm voice
Tantrum—yelling, crying, throwing objects, falling to the floor	Taking deep breath, using conversational voice tone, walking away, asking for time
Not listening/minding—saying, “No;” walking away from task, not doing task in expected time	Doing what s/he is told within a short time.