



Awesome Try

Great Effort

Well Done!

Good Job

The process of praising children effectively has a lot more nuances to it than you may realise, writes Jutta Dempsey

Over the last few decades there has been a movement in parenting towards giving our children increased praise in order to protect and build their self-esteem. However, how we praise our children has recently been put under scrutiny

with different researchers and experts finding that indiscriminate praising may make our children more dependent, egocentric and self-absorbed as well as making them more prone to bullying behaviour.

There is no doubt that praise from parents, the most important people in their lives, is crucial to all aspects of a child's development, from academic and sporting achievements to social and emotional functioning. However, some



praise, such as "well done", "you're so smart" and "great win" may actually be doing more damage than good to a child's self-confidence, resilience and independence

Researchers have discovered three important results of the increased praise movement:

[1] When children were praised for being intelligent or smart they were more likely to blame poor performance on a lack of ability and gave up sooner. However, children who were praised for their effort performed roughly 25% better on a set of problems as they persisted longer and enjoyed the challenge more.

(1) Dweck and Mueller

[2] Evaluative praise makes the child dependent on the approval of others rather than increasing their independence. "You are so generous" makes the child dependent on the judgement of the person who praised. (2) Joan LeFebvre Uni. Of Wisconsin

[3] "Over-focus on self-esteem over the last 30 years has produced more young people who are low in empathy and high in narcissism"

(3) Professor McGarth, RMIT

So where does this now leave us as parents?

This research may leave some parents feeling lost after thinking they were doing the right thing for their children. However, this research has now given us some useful insights into how to do even better as parents.

Here are some tips to start using in the way you praise your children:

[1] Provide specific feedback

Children will see general comments like "you're so smart" as something they can't change so they are less likely to make an effort to get better. Making specific comments about something they've done well is more effective. For example, saying something like "you did

better than last week and I noticed that you worked on your spelling every day", is more likely to make them pay attention and try harder.

[2] Give descriptive praise

Instead of evaluating what they've done, tell them what you've observed them do so they can recognise the truth and credit themselves. For example, "when you saw Sue forgot her hat and you played with her under the shelter so she wasn't alone I could see she was much happier." This comment helps your child see how their actions have had a positive effect.

The key question to ask yourself here is: does my praise make my children more dependent upon me and my approval or do I help them see a clear picture of their strengths, abilities and accomplishments?

[3] Be Sincere

Children are experts at reading body language and tone of voice. They know whether you're being sincere or not so when you're genuinely pleased with their behaviour allow your child to see it. Give them a hug or a smile.

[4] Role Model

Whatever skills, attitudes and behaviours you want to see in your children, must be role modelled at home. Giving yourself a break when something does not go perfectly and articulating that "its okay that I make mistakes because I learn so much from them" heightens children's risk-taking and persistence.

[5] Ask Questions

Show an interest in what your children are working on and foster discussions and an evaluation of what they have done. For example, "you've worked on that project all afternoon - can you tell me about it?"

great advice

Whilst parents may need to develop and adapt the way they praise their children as a result of this recent research, there will still never be any evidence to support being negative and critical. Comments such as "you're so stupid" go right to the core of who a child is and lasts for a lifetime. It has been said that it takes six positive statements to undo one negative one but labels like "stupid" just stick forever.