



Building Blocks

for Parents

MORE IS BETTER & FOCUSED IS BEST!

Behavior

Praising children

Children flourish and thrive when they receive praise from the important adults in their lives.

Praise is an essential component of a child's daily life. Through it a child receives positive, ego building messages which say: "You are unique." "You are important to me." "You can do it!"

Here are some effective ways to offer the gift of praise to your child.

- **Increase your praise level.** Criticism is often long and detailed but praise is short. It's easier to find fault rather than to see and express the many positives in a child. Every family should increase the level of praise in their home.

- **Be specific.** Rather than using vague and general terms, shape your vocabulary to be explicit and precise about what you want to commend.

Instead of saying, "I love your painting," try saying "You have a fantastic eye for color." Rather than saying, "You are such a good helper," say "Thank you for putting all of our clothes in the right drawers."

- **Stay honest.** Indiscriminate praise over every act and event will make the child question your sincerity as a parent. Children know when parents are insincere.

- **Don't compare.** Stay away from statements like these: "You are the best reader in your class." "You run faster than the other team players."

While such statements may not be false, they put someone else down. Comparisons can work against a child by promoting unnecessary competition and the fear of failure.

Also, no parent should ever compare his or her child negatively with another child. ("Why can't you be good like your friend Billy?")

Each little comparison may seem unimportant in itself but added together they can cause a child to believe that he will never be able to measure up.

- **Avoid negative compliments.** Unwittingly, some parents undermine their own efforts at praise by offering negative statements.

For example: "It's great to see you being good for a change." "I can't believe you've finally cleaned up your room."

Children believe what they're told about themselves. If you suggest negative qualities, the child will begin to think of himself that way.

- **Identify progress.** Like adults, children want to know that they are developing and improving their skills. Imagine how the young girl felt after she completed a series of cartwheels and heard her mother say: "Wow! You did four cartwheels in a row. That's something you couldn't have done a year ago."

- **Commend effort, not results.** Children will be greatly motivated when they are praised simply for the attempt at doing something new.

If a child is unable to dress himself completely, you can point out how nicely he has pulled on one stocking. Then he may go ahead and try to put on his shoes. You should commend the effort, whether successful or not.

In addition to words of praise, try reinforcing your comments with a physical act. A warm embrace, a loving kiss and a high five will serve to strengthen words of approval and admiration. □

