

THE POWER OF PRAISE AND ENCOURAGEMENT IN THE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD SCHOOL CHILDREN

by

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Abstract

This paper took a closer look at the power of praise and encouragement in the learning and development of Early Childhood School Children. The paper also looked at the tips for using praise and encouragement. The paper also examined the differences between praise and encouragement. It was concluded that effective praise can be especially powerful when children are trying out new behaviours or learning new habits that could become positive character traits. It was also recommended that parents should utilize predictable consequences to deal with negative behaviours and nurture positive behaviours with praise and encouragement.

Introduction

Most educators agree that children need supportive environment for learning and development. Effective parents utilize predictable consequences to deal with negative behaviours and nurture positive behaviours with praise. Praising your child for doing the right thing will make you a powerful influence in your child's life. Praise and encouragement can be especially powerful when children are trying out new behaviours or learning new habits that could become positive character traits.

This paper therefore examined the following;

- (i) Power of praise and encouragement in the learning and development of Early Childhood School Children.
- (ii) Tips for using praise and encouragement
- (iii) Differences between praise and encouragement

Parents don't often realize how much power they have to influence their children by giving them positive attention for their behaviours. Kids tend to do what gets them attention from their parents, even negative attention. Effective parents utilize predictable consequences to deal with negative behaviours and nurture positive behaviours with praise especially effective praise. Brophy (1981) defined praise as

“to commend the worth of or to express approval or admiration”. The more positive attention you give your child, the more your child will undertake new behaviours and persist at ones you value. Praising your child doing the right thing will make you a powerful influence in your child’s life. Praise and encouragement can be especially powerful when children are trying out new behaviours or learning new habits that could become positive character traits. Using effective praise help children feel good about themselves. When your child feels good around you, he will want to be around you more things to get positive attention from you. Educators and parents utilize effective praise to promote children self-esteem. Studies have shown that some statement of ineffective praise lower students’ confidence in themselves. Rowe (1974) found that ineffective praise in the traditional sense lowered children’s confidence as well as their verbal participation. Kourin (1970) also found that teachers use of ineffective praise did not play a role in effective classroom management therefore effective praise is an important component of a classroom management.

Tips for using Praise and Encouragement

- When you feel good about your child, say so. See if you can give your child some words of encouragement every day. The small things you say can build up over time to have a big effect on your child.
- Describe what it is that you like. This is called ‘descriptive praise’. When you say exactly what you’re happy about, your child knows what you mean for example, I like the way you’ve organized your room. You’ve found a spot for everything or I love the picture you drew. You, really know how to put colours together. And describing what you like is much more genuine and convincing than vague, praise such as you’re a good boy.
- Praise your child for his strengths. (Children have their own unique set of strengths and weaknesses). Try to appreciate your child’s good point. Try to avoid comparing one child to another, because this can lead to feelings of resentment or create unrealistic expectations.
- Encourage good behaviour with praise rather than pointing out the bad. This means trying to do more praising than criticizing.
- It takes a lot of praise to out weigh one criticism. Experts suggest trying to praise children six times for every one time you criticize them.
- Look for little changes and successes. If you wait until your child has done something perfectly to give a compliment, you might find yourself waiting forever.

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- Accept that everyone's different and love those differences. Encourage such child to develop and feel excited about particular interests. Help your child a sense of pride and confidence in her choices or activities.
- Surprise your child with a reward for good behaviour. For example, thanks for picking up the toys – let's go to the park to celebrate or thanks for helping me prepare dinner. You can choose what we have for desert.
- Praise effort as well as achievement. Recognize and praise how hard your child is trying – for example; you worked really hard on that essay or thank you for remembering to hang your coat on the peg.
- Decide what values, positive character traits or new behaviours are most important for your child to develop at this point in her life, and look for opportunities to reinforce them.
- Describe exactly what your child did that you are praising. Don't just say, "Great job!" say "Great job of clearing the table after dinner and doing it without being asked", or "I really like the way you picked up everything in your room".
- Try to give praise as soon as you can. Praise particularly effective praise will be most reinforcing them because your child will be most aware of what she did.
- Don't hesitate to praise your child for doing something well day after day. Your child needs to know that you notice good habit he is developing.
- Praise your child for trying hard. Whether it is learning a sport, being responsible at home or including children who may be left out of activities at school, learning new behaviours can be part of the learning process and that the most important thing is to keep making the effort. Persistence ultimately pays off.
- Connect success to effort when you praise. This is another way of letting your child know that you value the efforts she made even more than the success. It also reinforces the notion that success eventually comes from consistently making the efforts and helps your child learn to be persistent.

- Stay alert, keep looking for things to praise. If you need to, catch your child in the act of doing it almost right. Think about the new behaviour your child is trying to learn.
- Don't be afraid to ask your child what he's proud of. You can't expect to see everything, but you can try to learn about what your child did that is praise worthy.
- Try to avoid pointing out mistakes. This often comes across as criticism and criticism usually back fires. Although criticism will sometimes get a child to do what you want – especially if you keep it up until your child feel good about you or about what she is doing. It also doesn't teach children to learn to spot their own mistakes. It keeps them dependent on their parents to tell them what to do.
- Use questions to help your child learn mistakes. Under some circumstances pointing out mistakes may be acceptable, provided it is done in a larger context of praise and positive reinforcement.

Differences between Praise and Encouragement

Praise has been widely used in early childhood education and care settings as far back as any of us would care to remember. Praise is generally taken to mean how we use words and phrases such as “*good work!*”, “*great drawing Noah*” or “*I really like the way you're sitting on that mat Alison*”. Praise is when you tell your child what you like about him or her behaviour. It goes a long way towards helping your child feel good about herself.

Descriptive praise is when you tell your child exactly what it is that you like. For example, “*I love the way you shared your Lego with your brother just now*”. Descriptive praise is best for good behaviour – when children get praise for behaving well, they're likely to want to keep behaving well.

You can praise children at different ages for different things. You might praise a younger child for leaving the part when asked or for having a go at tying his own shoelaces. You can praise teenagers for coming home at an agreed time or for starting homework without being reminded.

“*Good job!*” “*Nice work!*” “*I like how you are sitting!*” Do you catch yourself saying these phrases and others like them when working with children? These words are words of praise.

Praise

- Is usually given to a child when a task is completed.
- Causes children to focus on external rewards rather on the intrinsic reward of a job well done.
- Can be manipulative, may lead to anger and resentment.
- Creates individuals who are dependent on other people's judgment.
- Has the potential to lower a child's confidence.
- Can have the reverse effect: instead of motivating a child, the child may not attempt a difficult task or not take a chance risk to avoid a negative evaluation.

Using Praise to Change Behaviour

You can use praise as a tool to help change difficult behaviour and replace it with desirable behaviours. The first step is watching for times when your child behaves the way you want. When you see the desirable behaviour, or another behaviour you like, immediately get your child's attention. Then tell your child exactly what you liked about the behaviour. You can praise effort as well as achievement – for example, *“it's great how you used words to ask for that toy”*. You could even look for ways to reward the desirable behaviour – for example, give your child a high five or special cuddle. At the beginning, you can praise every time you see the behaviour. When your child starts doing the behaviour more often, you can praise it less.

Encouragement (sometimes known as informative feedback) differs from praise in how the views of each person in the communication exchange are made evident in providing encouragement, educators remove their own thoughts/feelings from their comments and instead, focus the conversation on the child's thoughts/feelings. This removes us from what could be seen as a judgemental position.

When looking to improve our practices, we often need to reconsider the way that we have done some things for years we need to break the habit. Like breaking any habit, changing from using praise to using encouragement with children involves

us rethinking how we do the most basic of everyday things, like our interactions in particular the ones that are on the fly or automatic.

Encouragement.....

- Is specific feed back
- Refers to a positive response that focuses on student efforts and/or specific attributes of work completed.
- Is generally teacher initiated and takes place privately.
- Focuses on improvement of process rather than evaluation of product.
- Is delivered with a natural tone and a sincere voice.
- Helps children develop an appreciation of their own behaviours and achievements.

Encouragement Strategies

- Join in child's play. Don't lead. Imitate what the child is doing. Take on a role in their pretend play.
- Encourage children to use their language to describe their ideas or products. Ask open-ended questions (***"Tell me about...."***) us. Closed questions, those that can be answered with one-word or yes/no response (***"Did you ride the bike?" "What colour is that?"***). Be sincere when asking questions and listen to the answers.
- Acknowledge a child's work and efforts using non-judgmental comments and positive feedback. Words such as good/bad/beautiful/excellent/great are words that pass judgment on the quality of a child's work of behaviour. To help children develop the ability to judge their own efforts and products, adults need to avoid using judgment words. Focus words on the effort, the process; be specific in describing what you observe.

Encouragement is praise for effort-for example, 'you worked hard on that math's home work'. Praising effort can encourage your child to try hard in the future. But you can also use encouragement before and during an activity to help your child do the activity or behaviour. For example, 'show me how, well you can

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put your toys away' or 'I know you've nervous about the test, but you've studied hard. No matter how it turns out, you've done your best'.

Some children, especially those who are less confident, need more encouragement than others.

Conclusion and Recommendation

It was concluded that effective praise can be especially powerful when children are trying out new behaviours or learning new habits that could become positive character traits. It was recommended that parents should utilize predictable consequences to deal with negative behaviour and nurture positive behaviours with praise and encouragement.

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