

## Tip Sheet: Labeled Praise



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### Positive Parenting –P is for Praise

In Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), the focus is on promoting a strong parent- child relationship. To do this, we begin by working on improving children's behavior with only positive attention. When encouraging positive behavior in children, it is helpful to focus on rewarding positive behaviors. A common 'parent trap' is to respond only or mostly to misbehaviors, with the intention of correcting behavior. The catch to correcting behavior is that children may receive more attention for negative behaviors than for positive ones.

In order to parent more positively, it is valuable to place an attentional spotlight on what we want children to do, rather than what *not* to do. One of the ways we do this is by encouraging parents to learn the language of labeled praise. This involves catching your child being good and using a specific type of praise to teach them that you like that positive behavior. Positive behavior here can refer to any behavior you want to see (or see more of), including sharing, concentrating, being kind, playing quietly, and many more!

Labeled praise tells children exactly what we like about what they have done. 'Good job building that tower', 'great concentrating on reading your storybook' and 'I like how quickly you're cleaning up' are all examples of labeled praises. Unlike 'good job', which doesn't tell the child what they have done well, 'good job asking nicely' tells the child that you approve of his or her behavior. It also gives positive attention to a specific behavior, which will increase the child's motivation to repeat that behavior.

Labeled praise makes children and parents alike feel good by increasing the quality time shared with one another. It also encourages more positive behavior from children, improves self-esteem and boosts the positivity of parent-child interactions.

### Steps to Success

- Catch your child being good**  
 Often we are so busy correcting behavior that we miss taking notice when children do something good, or something expected, so we don't praise it. A tip is to try to double your praises. Praising helps to promote positive behaviors that you would like to see, such as asking politely and taking turns.
- Label your praise**  
 While there is no such thing as bad praise, labeled praise is the best kind. Turning 'well done' into 'well done for cleaning up so quickly', tells your child exactly what it is you've liked about what they've done. This will help them to repeat this positive behavior in the future.
- Sing your praises!**  
 Ok – you don't literally have to sing, but being enthusiastic and excited when giving praise is a powerful tool, and helps children notice just how much you like a behavior.
- Pair praise with physical affection**  
 A hug is worth 1000 words. Pairing praise with physical affection adds extra incentive to praise. This may involve giving your child a high five, a hug, tousling their hair, or (depending on their age) lifting them in the air!
- Praise more than you preach**  
 A helpful rule of thumb to make praise more potent is that you should use labeled praise for positive behavior 5 times for every 1 time you correct a behavior, tell your child what not to do, or respond to a misbehavior.



### Cheat Sheet:

- P**raise often and specifically using labeled praise
- R**eward and reinforce behaviors you want to see (or see more of)
- A**ctively catch your child being good
- I**ncrease attention to positive behaviors
- S**how your child you are proud of their positive behaviour by pairing praise with affection
- E**nthusiasm is key! (and so is consistency)

### What to Praise:

- Using good manners: talking nicely
- Behavior: being calm, quiet, careful, kind
- Paying attention: concentrating, trying hard
- Prosocial behaviors: turn-taking, sharing, caring
- Playing nicely: creativity, imagination, gentleness

### Ways to Praise:

- "Thank you for... (asking politely, taking turns)"
- "I like it when you... (share, listen well)"
- "It's nice that you are... (keeping your room tidy)"
- "You did a great job of... (playing quietly/calmly)"
- "I'm so happy with you for... (being gentle with...)"
- "I'm proud of how you... (listened the first time...)"