



## **Praise v Encouragement**

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### *The problem with praise*

We praise people, especially children not only to get them to do good work but to encourage them to develop good values and healthy self-esteem. However praise is usually focused on the end result not on the quality of the child to achieve that result. E.g. "What a great result you achieved on that exam" rather than "wow you worked really hard and put in a great effort to get an excellent result - well done!" This can lead to kids becoming approval junkies. It is a way of using and perpetuating our children's dependence on us. It sustains a dependence on our evaluations and our decision about what is good or bad.

Carol Dweck, PhD, while doing research as a professor at Columbia State University found that praise (as described above) is in fact not good for children. In her study she found children who were praised for being smart when they accomplished a task chose easier tasks in the future. They didn't want to risk making mistakes. On the other hand children who were encouraged for their efforts were willing to choose more challenging tasks when given a choice. It is important to encourage the effort and not the result.

Encouragement provides opportunities for children to feel:

- capable
- courageous
- resilient
- enjoyment in doing this for who they are
- they are making a contribution to society

Encouragement that emphasizes the effort gives the child a variable they can control. They come to see themselves as in control of their success. Encouragement leads to the belief that "I can continue to learn and improve". Whereas praising intelligence leads to a belief that "I need to do only the things that make me continue to look smart or talented"

Encouragement focuses on:

- effort
- improvement
- contribution
- enjoyment
- confidence



## **5 tips on how to offer encouragement:**

- 1.** Encourage the effort or the learning and not the end result: Say "you really showed some great courage when you got up to make that speech - well done." Rather than "that was a great speech".
- 2.** Give genuine encouragement and avoid manipulation e.g. "Your term paper is so neat - I wish you would do all your work that neatly!"
- 3.** Use specific statements of encouragement not global statements, e.g. "You have worked really hard to work out that maths problem" rather than "You're really good at maths"
- 4.** Be sincere, don't praise undeserved success. E.g. Getting a grade of "A" on a task that required no effort. Instead: "you did very well on that so let's see if we can find you something more challenging to work on"
- 5.** Use encouragement for effort now - don't connect to work way in the future. e.g. "You did a great job of studying I know you'll do well on the test" (What happens if they studied hard and still didn't do well?)