

“Praise vs. Encouragement”

In the complicated world of parenting, we're taught so many new ideas and practices that are based on the latest research, current trends and the sociological climate. Think of the contrast between what was known when we were raised and what we know now raising our little ones. Although we grew up being called “bad” or “naughty”, we now say that our children are “not being good listeners”. While we had to stand in the corner, our children sit in time out. We've gone from “no hitting” (spank!) to “I know it's hard to share, let's think of some ways you can solve this problem without hurting anyone.”

Changing our speech and wording has been an important step in raising our children's self esteem, problem solving and coping skills. At times we fumble for words as we strive to be politically correct, without seeming permissive, consistent, yet not rigid.

Praise vs. encouragement is yet another area where we as parents can focus on fine-tuning our language choices to build up our children. Praise is defined as *to express a favorable judgment*. Some examples of praise are: “good job, nice work, super picture, awesome reading, great shot!” Encourage is *to inspire; to spur on; to foster and raise one's confidence*. Encouragement differs from praise in that it focuses on the children's effort and raises the expectations for them so that they feel that they are on the path of success. An example is: “Wow! Look at the colors you used in your drawing. I bet you could add some stripes on your tiger. I'll hang it on the wall when it's finished!”

Raising the bar means that your child feels appropriately recognized for the effort and specifically motivated to continue. Encouragement does, however, stop short of being constructive criticism. Young children have very vulnerable feelings and, depending on their chronological age, may be in a developmental phase in which they are building their self worth. This is not a time for criticism. Think of encouragement as praise with a shot of caffeine. It's the new improved version that builds up and keeps kids going.

Remember:

- ~ **be positive** “What an amazing story you wrote.”
- ~ **identify specific strengths** “I love the way you described the beautiful princess.”
- ~ **make suggestions** “It would be neat if you describe what the giant looks like too.”
- ~ **have high expectations** “I can't wait to read the finished story!”

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