

Using Praise

positive parenting skill

Praise is a powerful tool that parents can use to encourage their child's good behaviors. Research has shown that positive reinforcement—such as praise—is far more effective than discipline. This handout describes techniques for using praise to its maximum potential.

Catch your child being good.

It's normal to focus more on unwanted behaviors, rather than good ones. Sometimes, a good behavior can be as simple as the *absence* of an unwanted behavior (for example, talking with a sibling instead of arguing). Make a point to praise your child's good behaviors, even if they seem ordinary.

"You were really good during dinner."

"Thank you for getting along with your brother."

Start with small steps.

An easy goal for adults might be a big deal for kids. Try starting small. Instead of waiting for your child to follow the rules all day, praise them when they follow the rules for 15 minutes. Focus on the *steps* toward achieving a goal, rather than the end goal itself.

"Good job bringing home your homework."

"Thank you for remembering to start your chores."

Praise effort, not outcome.

Many things in life are outside of our control. For example, your child might study for hours and still not get the grade they want. By praising the actions that are in your child's control (studying), you will teach them skills that are more likely to create good outcomes (good grades).

"You've been doing such a good job studying—I'm sorry you didn't get the grade you wanted."

"I'm proud of you for trying out for the swim team. It's great that you tried, even if you didn't make it."

Don't sweat the small stuff.

When kids don't get positive attention, they'll often settle for negative attention. If an unwanted behavior isn't dangerous or destructive, try ignoring it. After the unwanted behavior has stopped, wait a few moments, and praise your child for something good they are doing.

Be consistent.

Just like eating one apple won't make you healthy, praising your child once won't instantly improve their behavior. Giving praise *regularly* will help your child build the behavior you're looking for.