

One Page Resource: Praise Versus Encouragement

Early childhood researchers have found that praise may negatively impact children.

“Praise is like other forms of reward which discourage children from judging for themselves what is right and wrong. Praise may lead to dependency because children come to rely on the authority figure to tell them what is right or wrong, good or bad.”

-Kamii, C. (1984). Viewpoint: Obedience is not enough. *Young Children*, 39(4), p. 13.

“No child can always be good, or nice, or smart. Consequently, in order to avoid negative evaluations, they may tend not to take chances and try difficult tasks.”

-Implications for early childhood teachers. *Young Children*, p. 8.

“To judge at all implies superiority and takes away from the children’s power to judge their own work. Such praise is not conducive to self-reliance, self-direction, or self-control. To the child, if the authority figure can judge positively, they can also judge negatively”

-Ginott, H. (1972). *Teacher and child*. Boston, MA: Macmillan Co. p. 93.

Do you frequently make comments to children like “Good job,” “Way to go,” “Nice work,” “Beautiful,” or “I like the way Molly is sitting...?” If so, you are like most adults who work with young children. Most of us have probably made statements like these for years. We may even have received training in how to praise. Many adults praise children liberally because they believe this is an effective way to help children feel good about themselves and their work. Praise is also thought of as a management tool – a way to get children “settled” or ready to start an activity.

-1996, HighScope Educational Research Foundation

Here are some things you can do to encourage rather than praise children:

- 1) Participate side-by-side with a child, following the child’s lead and imitating what he or she is doing.**
 - Sit down next to Marlene in the Block Area. Observe her work and say, “Wow, I think I will try to stack the square blocks just like you are doing!” Imitate the way Marlene is building.
- 2) Acknowledge children’s work by offering specific feedback.**
 - Say “Marlene, you have counted all 17 blocks! I wonder if you will add any more.”
- 3) Encourage children to describe their own work.**
 - Ask “What can you tell me about your structure, Marlene?” “How did you build it?” Be ready to respond with more questions and comments based on what Marlene tells you.

-1996 HighScope Educational Research Foundation