

Parenting: Using Encouragement Over Praise

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When your child gets a good grade, figures out how to do something, or completes something we often respond with praise such as “Great job!”, “Excellent”, “Way to get an A on that!”. This is defined as praise. While praise can be boosting of children’s self-esteems in the moment, it doesn’t help them long-term. What can be even more helpful is starting to use encouragement over praise.

Encouragement is when our communication focuses on the process and details of what your child is doing rather than the outcome. Using the same example of your child getting a good grade, an example of encouragement is “You worked so hard on that!”. It is important to use encouragement when your child is in the middle of trying to do something and using statements such as “That is a really hard set to put together but you’re not giving up”, “I know you can figure this out”, “Look at all the detail and colors you put into your drawing of a flower!”.

The reason why we want to use encouragement more often than praise is that encouragement is internally motivating (It’s good because I think it’s good) whereas praise is externally motivating (It’s good because mom/dad says it’s good). This can lead to a child’s efforts or their successes to be dependent on the praise that follows rather than being motivated themselves to try and do something.

By using encouragement more often than praise can it lead to your child working hard on things because they are wanting to and are not afraid to try again when they don’t get it the first time. It builds confidence and persistence. To help build your child’s self-esteem we must let them receive the message that they are capable even when they don’t get something the first time. Thus, it is important to let your child struggle and give them encouragement with something you know that they can figure out. Using encouragement shows your faith and acceptance in your child’s abilities and will boost their self-esteem in the long run!

Effective Communication Style: Learning to Respond versus React

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One of the best effective communication skills that I have learned in relationship with others is how to practice responding versus reacting. When we begin to understand the difference between responding and reacting, our self-awareness and ability to self-regulate emotions and behaviors improves. Behavior and communication that is emotion-driven and based on in-the moment feelings is reactionary. Whereas, if we become aware of how our actions and words spoken to others affect the escalation or de-escalation and outcome of interactions we are practicing responding.

It can be helpful to take time to process how the words and actions of another made you feel. Journaling can be useful in this manner by asking yourself questions such as, when I spoke these words back, was I angry? Or was I feeling hurt and in some way wanting to get back at the person for what they did to me? To process this even more and look at the outcome of your reaction- ask how did this affect the feedback you received from the person and what were their actions that followed? What was the outcome on the relationship, and did you get the outcome you desired?

After processing your reaction and the outcome of previous communication, if you find things escalated and left the relationship strained – you can be intentional about needing to take a moment away from the issue, to prevent reacting when one is upset. Prioritize, coming back to the issue when emotions are less heightened. Often, when we react with heightened emotions, we regret what we do and say or feel as if we have over-reacted. It can be more effective to step away when feeling angry. Set a time when you are better regulated in emotions and behavior, to engage in communication and to address the topic of concern.

In the next blog, I will talk about how we can respond in healthy ways, communicate our feelings effectively and ways to deescalate arguments and conversations that are emotionally heightened.