

ALTERNATIVES TO PRAISE

By Larissa Dann

Definitions of Praise: *“Praise is a verbal message that communicates a positive evaluation of a person, a person’s behaviour, or a person’s accomplishments.”¹ “Praise is a type of reward. Praise from a parent gives a child the reward of being valued by a parent.”² Praise is a ‘you-message’, and is used to manipulate or control a child’s behaviour, to encourage a repetition of the behaviour.*

Examples: “You’re such a good girl/boy” “You’ve painted a beautiful picture”
“You’ve done a really good job” “You’ve done really well with your homework.”

Some Alternatives (acknowledgement, encouragement)

Positive/appreciative I-messages

Describe the other person’s behaviour, how it made you feel, and any effect it had on you. You could include all these sections, or any combination of two, or just one.

Examples: “I really appreciate you hanging out the clothes. It means I can get dinner ready on time.”
“I love you.”
“I was impressed with the way you helped your brother.”
“I was so pleased when I watched the way you performed at the concert“ (an alternative to ‘proud of you’?)
“Thank you – I really appreciated your help. Now I can relax”.

Active Listening response

With an active listening response, the parent indicates their empathic understanding of their child’s positive experience.

Examples: “WOW! You look so excited about the way you swam today!”
“You seem pleased with your test results.”
“You look as though you had a great time at the party”
“You seem happy with your painting.”

Encouragement

Noticing their effort.

Examples: “You tried really hard to draw the circle”
“How do you feel about it?” “What do you think?”
“You seem to have put a lot of effort in to your assignment”
“You finished all your dinner! Cool!”
“Tell me about your drawing”

Descriptive appreciation

This is a bit of a combination of the alternatives above. Here, you describe in detail what you see or feel.

Examples: “You worked out that if you put the block here, there would be no room for the other block. I’m impressed”
“I noticed that you set the table without being asked, and made sure that everyone had a drink. Thank you.”

Spontaneous ‘praise’.

At times, we will spontaneously applaud our children with “praise” – because we are happy, impressed, pleased with their actions or achievements. This needs to be differentiated from the praise described above, where a major purpose of the praise is to get a repetition of the behaviour, or to control the child.

Reference: Gordon, Thomas. Teaching Children Self-discipline. 1989
Dinkemeyer, D. et al. STEP – Parenting Young Children. 1989.
Faber, A & Mazlish, E. How to talk so Kids will Listen, and Listen so Kids will Talk.
Porter, L. Children are People, Too.

¹Gordon, Thomas. Teaching Children Self-discipline. 1989

² Dinkemeyer, D. et al. STEP – Parenting Young Children. 1989.