

Mental Fitness News and Tips

Praise or Encouragement?

Which works best to build a positive, mentally fit, healthy self concept in children... praise or encouragement? It does help to know the difference.

- **Praise** is general and focuses on the adult's feelings and opinions. *Example: "I love your picture!"*
- **Encouragement** is specific and describes a child's efforts. *Example: "You put lots of details and color into this drawing."*
- **Praise** teaches children to measure themselves by what others like or want. This can make children less likely to think for themselves and more likely to give in to what others want - without considering the possible consequences.
- **Encouragement** helps children listen to other people's thoughts but then make up their own mind about the kind of person they want to be and what they want to do - knowing that they will need to live with the consequences of their decisions. This builds responsibility. *Example: "I noticed that you helped your sister with her homework. She seems happy."* Instead of *"That was so nice of you to help your sister with her homework!"*
- When **praise** (Wow! Awesome! Cool!) is overused, it loses meaning. It also sets children up for failure because it's impossible to be "Awesome" all the time.
- **Encouragement** is especially important for children who feel poorly about themselves. Praise can make them feel uncomfortable or suspicious.
- **Encouragement** feels safe because there is no judgment (positive or negative) attached.



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4 Ways to Encourage

Be specific

Instead of *"Wow! This is such a great story you wrote,"* make specific comments. *"You used lots of description in your story. When I read it I can really picture the characters."*

Describe what the child is doing or has done

Instead of general statements like *"Good job,"* comment on what the child is doing. *"You straightened up your bedroom without being asked. Thanks!"*

Describe the effect of a child's efforts on others

When a child hears encouragement such as *"I appreciate your help fixing lunch"* or *"You were a good friend to Jorge when you helped him look for his phone,"* the child's positive effect on others becomes the motivator - not our praise.

Avoid comparing children

To encourage a child without putting down others, try, *"You can really run fast"* instead of *"You're the fastest runner."*

[Adapted from the Better Kid Care Program](#)

This newsletter is provided by the School Community Partnership for Mental Health, of which MPS is an integral part.