



THE POWER OF WORDS: Better Ways to Encourage and Guide

Judgmental and evaluative praise is not helpful. It creates anxiety, invites dependency, and evokes defensiveness. It is not conducive to self-reliance, self-direction, and self-control, qualities that demand freedom from outside judgment. Children need to be free from the pressure of evaluative praise so that others do not become their source of approval.

Praise consists of two parts: what we say to children and what they in turn say to themselves.

Our words should state clearly what we like and appreciate about their effort, help, work, consideration, creation, or accomplishments. Our words should be framed so that a child will almost inevitably draw from them a realistic conclusion about his or her personality. Our words should be like a magic canvas upon which children cannot help but paint a positive picture of themselves.

Our words should be a description that details delight and admiration, words that convey recognition of effort, and statements that transmit respect and understanding.

Provide your child with guidance rather than criticism. When things go wrong, it is best to deal only with the event, not with the person. Children can learn major lessons in values from minor mishaps. Parental criticism is unhelpful. It creates anger and resentment. Even worse, children who are regularly criticized learn to condemn themselves and others. They learn to doubt their own worth and to belittle the value of others. They learn to suspect people and to expect personal doom.

It's ironic that many parents find it easier to point out what's wrong with their children than what's right with them. Yet, if we want our children to grow up feeling confident and self-assured, we need to take every opportunity to emphasize the positive and avoid demeaning comments.

Words have the power to build and energize or to frighten and devastate. When we notice and appreciate children's efforts, we help them grow in hope and confidence. It is important that we be positive and encouraging with children. When there are problems, look for solutions rather than blame or criticize. Even the inevitable anger can be expressed without labeling or blaming. Behind all these skills of caring communication is a deep respect for children.

Taken from "Between Parent and Child" by Dr. Haim G. Ginott (revised and updated by Dr. Alice Ginott & Dr. H. Wallace Goddard.)

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