

Preference of using Encouragement rather than Praise

Children thrive when their parents use encouragement rather than praise and here is why. When children behave in a way we would like them to repeat, we want to capture that moment! Not unlike using a photograph to make a memorable occasion more permanent. An example of using praise is to say to a child: “good job”, which does not allow an internal sense with the child of how that good job happened. However, by using encouragement, we pay attention to the details and sequencing of what the child did to result in their success. This might be something like “I noticed that you really studied last week when you could have been playing your video game instead, and you made an 89 on your math test”. This reflects the behavior that led to the success. When children notice that we pay attention to the effort, it matches the facts that led to their achievement.

During many counseling sessions, I often say to parents, if you remember little else we speak about today, remember that what you pay attention to, you get more of! Howard Glasser of “Nurtured Heart Approach” says “don’t water the weeds!” When a parent uses encouragement, a child automatically pays attention to what you, the parent are focused on. Likewise, if we pay attention to what we don’t like, that is the behavior that will be repeated. The difference is subtle, and transitioning from praise to encouragement can be a challenge until we see that it actually does work.

By the way, this also works well for our spouse or significant other!

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