PRAISE

The Power of Positive Attention

Parents are often unaware of the powerful influence their attention can have on their children’s behaviors. The influence can best be appreciated when you begin to provide positive attention more effectively and more systematically in the form of praise.

GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE PRAISE:

1. **Praise the desired behavior IMMEDIATELY after it occurs.** Praise tends to be more powerful if it occurs closer in time to the behavior.

2. **Praise the desired behavior as PREDICTABLY and consistently as possible.** When first attempting to increase the desired behavior, it is best to offer predictable praise each and every time the behavior occurs. After some time, however, the praise for well-established behavior need only be intermittent and occasional. But remember; **praise for the positive behavior must always be greater than and more consistent than attention to the negative behavior.**

3. **Praise the desired behavior using SPECIFIC language.** Be as direct and as clear as possible regarding the behavior you would like to see more. For example, “Michael, I like how you took out the garbage” is more specific and preferable to “good job Michael.”

4. **Praise should be PURELY POSITIVE.** Avoid using negative tags. For example, when praising your child for staying quiet while you are on the telephone, you might say, “Thank you for staying quiet while I was on the phone.” However, if you say, “Thank you for staying quiet while I was on the phone, why don’t you do that all of the time?” you are mistakenly focusing on the problem behavior. This makes the praise less positive than it could be otherwise.

5. **Praise the desired behavior as ENTHUSIASTICALLY as possible.** Children’s negative behaviors often receive loud, enthusiastic parental responses. Try responding to positive behaviors with similarly loud and exaggerated displays of positive attention and appreciation and SMILE while you are doing it!

6. **Focus on your child’s EFFORTS and BEHAVIORS** (e.g., “You worked hard on that homework. I’m proud of you”). Avoid using superlatives (e.g., “You’re the best” or “the smartest,” etc.). Also, avoid focusing too much on physical characteristics (e.g., “You’re the prettiest”).

HOMEWORK

Pay more attention to how often you praise your child’s positive behaviors and your own style of praise.

1. Identify one positive behavior your child exhibits occasionally that you’d like to see more often.

2. Try to follow the guidelines on the handout to praise the chosen behavior each time it occurs.

3. Don’t wait for the positive behavior to be performed to perfection, praise your child’s steps or efforts toward accomplishing the behavior.