

Praising and encouraging your child (0-6 years)

Praise and encouragement

Praise is when you tell your child what you like about her or her behaviour. Encouragement is praise for effort – for example, ‘You’re working very hard on that maths homework’.

Why are praise and encouragement important?

Your praise and encouragement show your child how to think and talk positively about herself, and how to recognise and appreciate when she does well.

How to praise and encourage

Sometimes it is easier to criticise than it is to compliment. Bad behaviour is often more obvious than good behaviour – for example, you are more likely to notice when your child is yelling than you are to notice when she is quietly reading a book. Try to pay attention to the good behaviour too!

When you are praising your child, tell her exactly what it is that you like. For example, ‘I like the way you’ve found a spot for everything in your room’. This helps your child understand what you are happy with. It’s also more effective than vague praise like ‘You’re a good girl’.

Children are more likely to repeat behaviour that earns praise. This means you can use praise to help stop difficult behaviour and increase good behaviour. The first step is to watch for times when your child behaves the way you want. Be sure to immediately get your child’s attention and tell her exactly what you liked. At first, you can praise every time you see the behaviour. When your child starts doing the behaviour more often, you can praise it less.

Praising effort can encourage your child to try hard in the future – it is very motivating. For example, ‘I can see how hard you’re trying to tie your shoe laces. Great effort, you’re not giving up!’

When praise and encouragement are focused on effort, your child is more likely to keep trying and to be optimistic when she faces challenges. If you only praise for the results, she is more likely to give up when it gets harder. For example, if you only praise a good score on the maths test, your child is more likely to stop trying when maths gets harder.

Rewards

A reward is a consequence of good behaviour. It is a way of saying ‘well done’ after your child has done something good or behaved well. It could be a treat, a surprise or an extra privilege. For example, as a reward for keeping her room tidy, you might let your child choose what’s for dinner.

Rewards can make your praise and encouragement work better.

A reward is not the same as a bribe. A bribe is given before the behaviour you want, and a reward is given after. Rewards reinforce good behaviour, but bribes don’t.

Tips for using praise and encouragement

Help build your child's self-esteem and encourage good behaviour with these tips:

- **When you feel good about your child, say so.** See if you can give your child some words of encouragement every day. This builds up over time to have a big effect on your child.
- **Try to praise more than you criticise.** As a guide, try to praise your child six times for every one time you say something negative.
- **Look for little changes and successes.** Rather than waiting until your child has done something perfectly to give a compliment, try to praise any effort or improvement.
- **Accept that everyone is different.** Praise your child for her unique strengths and encourage her interests. This will help develop her sense of pride and confidence.
- **Surprise your child with a reward for good behaviour.** For example, 'Thanks for picking up all those toys – let's go to the park to celebrate'.
- **Praise effort as well as achievement.** Recognise and praise how hard your child is trying – for example, 'You worked really hard on that homework' or 'Thank you for remembering to hang your coat on the peg'.



Recommended Reads by the National Library Board

Recommended Reads

- [Positive discipline parenting tools: the 49 most effective methods to stop power struggles, build communication, and raise empowered, capable kids](#)
- [Your defiant child: 8 steps to better behaviour](#)
- [The Soul of Discipline: The Simplicity Parenting Approach to Warm, Firm, and Calm Guidance—from Toddlers to Teens](#)