



**CONNECTICUT
NETWORK**
FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

**Beyond "Good Job":
How to Use Praise Effectively in After School Settings**

Imagination Travel



Imagination Travel: See Guide for instructions on how to use this activity.

Where is our destination?



Where is our destination? Or, what do we hope to achieve with the children we work with?

Debrief: Each successive group received a different type of praise.

- 1) “Good job” and “You” statements are positive but do not tell participants anything specific about their ideas.
- 2) “I” statements such as “I am so proud” are also positive but can have negative effects in trying to generate positive behavior in children and youth. This is external praise and can create anxious children who feel that all their effort must be to please adults without specific guidelines on how to accomplish this.
- 3) The last 2 groups received questions that asked participants to be more reflective in their response. This generated a dialogue that asked the participant to think about their cognitive process and to express feelings about the work they did. These types of statements create internal praise that is not dependent upon adult reinforcement.
- 4) Ask the first group if they would have done anything differently based upon the feedback they had received. Then ask the last group if they might have done anything differently based on the feedback they received.

This workshop will go into greater detail about the use of praise and will share strategies for using praise that can generate change in children’s behavior. These will be skills to help us reach our “destination.”



Relationships Section of the CT-QSAT

The relationships shared by staff, children, youth and families are vital to the successful achievement of a program's mission and goals. This section includes both staff to child/youth and staff to staff guides. It asks if the children and youth are happy in the program.

Do they feel welcome?

Do staff know what each child or youth's interests are and do staff encourage children and youth to pursue those interests within the program?

How can you see that the staff serve as role models?

Review each item carefully to determine how you meet these goals.

What do we hope to achieve by praising children?



Ask participants to reflect on the types of praise they themselves received as children from a parent, teacher, or adult leader. Share a personal story of your own.

Describe the effect this had on you.

Why do adults praise children? Is there a purpose to praise?

Ask the above questions to generate a list which may include the following :

- To motivate children to achieve or behave in positive ways
- To control group behavior
- To create a positive environment for children
- Reinforce positive behavior
- To improve self esteem

Generate a list of 5-10 phrases. (All phrases will have value as the workshop progresses.)

Types of Praise

Two basic types of praise:

- Praise for “being”

- Praise for “effort and accomplishment”



Two Types of praise –(as you describe the types of praise return to the list participants generated to identify statements that fit this category).

1. Praise for “Being” instead of acknowledgement of effort and progress.

a. Vague, does not give specific information on what exactly was so good. Includes “good job” “you are so smart” “that’s pretty”

b. Tends to focus on aspects of a child over which they have no control –prettiness, intelligence, talent

c. Vague statements of praise may actually confuse a child and generate a mistrust of this and any future praise. “He is just saying that but doesn’t really mean it.” To demonstrate this principle:

Example: Many people, particularly women, will negate the compliments such as “nice outfit” instead of simply saying “Thank you.” They will say “This old thing?? You must be kidding.”

Example: “You did well in this course.” “Well, that is because the teacher was too easy in scoring.”

2. Acknowledgement of Progress and Effort is most helpful

a. Specific, includes details “Since you have been doing all your math homework, you have brought up your grade!” rather than “You are such a good student.”

b. Specific details demonstrate interest in the child. “I can see you worked a long time on this project. Can you tell me about it?” (Your time and attention is as important as the encouragement!)

c. Recognition of effort will keep children trying to improve. “Last week you could not kick the ball but you practiced and now you can.”

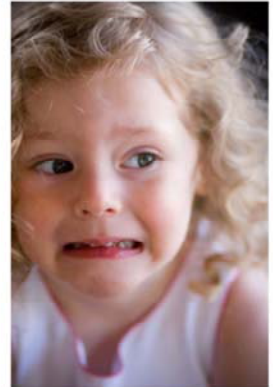
d. Use acknowledgements without commenting on character. “I noticed how you took the time to coach a younger child in soccer. I bet he appreciated that.”

e. Focus on the behavior –not the child “You waited quietly while I spoke to Mrs. Smith. That was respectful.” This type of comment also names the desired behavior which is helpful in encouraging more of it.

Praising children for trying their best to accomplish tasks gives them incentive and drive to continue to strive for their best and it teaches them how to feel pride.

Don't Compare with Praise

Is there ever a time when praise is bad for a child?



Can praise be bad?

Can you have too much of it?

Positive comments to a child are good but:

To really be effective praise should be focused.

There can be “too much of a good thing” if used unwisely.

There has been a great deal of controversy which we will cover next.

“The Psychology of Self-Esteem” by Nathaniel Branden, published in 1969 promoted the following ideas:

1. Self esteem was the single most important facet of a human being;
2. One must do whatever one can to achieve positive self esteem.



Self-Esteem Movement

“The Psychology of Self-Esteem” by Nathaniel Branden was published in 1969 promoting these ideas:

1. Self esteem was the single most important facet of a person;
2. One must do whatever one can to achieve positive self esteem.

The “self esteem movement” resulted in

1. Overuse of positive praise: Every player on the team has to receive a prize and all prizes have to be equal.
2. Avoidance of failure and lower standards to measure success. The multitude of studies on self-esteem since that time show that high self esteem has no effect on improving grades, reducing violent or self destructive behavior, or even career achievement.

Dweck and Baumeister, in the Association for Psychological Science, write that self esteem building praise actually causes the grades of failing college students to fall even lower. Meta-analysis of praise studies determined that praised students

1. Demonstrate Increased risk aversion –reluctant to try new things
2. Lack of perceived autonomy –little independence Shorter task persistence
3. Do “eye-checking” with teachers
4. Use inflected speech –answers have the intonation of questions.
5. Become More competitive Image conscious
6. More interested in tearing others down.
7. Praise “Junkies” Absence of praise is considered failure Learn to do only those things that please others

Praise as Celebration

Adults should use praise as a celebration of:

- What concrete or specific thing the person did for you;
- How you feel about that specific action;
- What need of yours was fulfilled by their action.



Praise as celebration

Marshall Rosenberg, founder of the Center for Non-Violent Communication writes, *“In NVC, we consider praise and compliments a ‘violent form of communication. Because they are part of the language of domination, it is one passing judgment on another.”*

The CNV recommends using praise to celebrate: to make clear three things in this celebration;

- 1) what the person did that enriched your life, not a generality like ‘you are so kind, beautiful, or wonderful’ but what concretely did they do for you.
- 2) how do you feel inside about their action? And,
- 3) what need of yours was fulfilled inside you by their contribution.

(This is a controversial statement. “Praise and compliments are a ‘violent’ form of communication.” As the presenter it is your choice to pause and ask participants how they interpret this statement.)

Praise and Behavior Management

- After school program staff can use meaningful praise to:
 1. Help children identify and name positive behaviors;
 2. Support increased demonstration of positive behaviors
 3. Model positive use of praise for children to imitate with their peers.



After school program staff can use meaningful praise to:

1. Help children identify and name positive behaviors; Unless positive behavior is clearly articulated many children will not know what you mean.

Teacher: "I expect good behavior."

Child: "What IS good behavior??"

Naming an emotion or action can help children to gain control of it. "Taking turns with glue sticks is cooperation, therefore, to be cooperative means taking turns."

2. Support increased demonstration of positive behaviors. ("Now that I know what to do, I can try to repeat it until I master it.")

3. Model positive use of praise for children to imitate with their peers. Draw the child's attention to good models of behavior. "Watch me while I talk to..."

Follow with "Did you see how I..."

"Good Job"

65 Ways to Say "Good Job"

1. Circle the statements that are vague.
2. Draw a square around those statements that demonstrate adult approval.
3. Reword the remaining for increased effectiveness.



"65" in American Sign Language



Rephrasing Positive Responses. As presenter you have the option of doing this activity in groups (original groups would be fine) or doing this with the whole group.

Use the handout "65 Ways to Say 'Good for You.'" Explain that this handout was originally prepared at the height of the Self-Esteem Movement.

Ask participants to:

- 1) Draw a circle around those statements that are vague or lack specific information on what was praiseworthy.
- 2) Draw a square around those statements that demonstrate adult approval ("I" statements).
- 3) Review the remaining statements. How could these be reworded for increased effectiveness?

Review the list generated by participants earlier in the workshop. How do these fit into participant's new understanding of the use of praise?

Where do we want to take the children
we work with?



Using praise effectively is one way to get where
we want to go.



- Where do we want to take the children we work with?
- After school staff have an impact on the type of adult the children will become.
- When we are intentional about the actions and decisions we make we can choose to make a positive impact.
- Using praise effectively is one way to get where we want to go.

What do we want children to remember when they leave our program?



Recall an occasion from your own childhood when a comment from an adult really made you feel good.

Those comments stick with us long into our lives.

What would you like the children you work with today to remember from you?

For more information on this topic
look on the web for :

1. Alfie Kohn "Five Reasons to Stop Saying 'Good Job'"
2. The National Network for Children Care
3. Familyeducation.com



Recall what participants listed as the reasons for praising children.

There are two basic types of praise:

- 1) Praise for being.
- 2) Praise for effort and accomplishment.

Yes, it is okay to tell someone they "look" nice or "are" nice but this should be secondary to praise for effort and accomplishment.

Yes, it is okay to say "good job" but concrete and meaningful comments related to the task being praised should be added.

Avoid using "I" statements in praising children. Reflect the accomplishment or effort back to the child. Asking the child to tell you about their work and what it means to them is more important than your approval.

The debate on how to use praise continues. For more information check out the following:

- Alfie Kohn: Five Reasons to Stop Saying "Good Job!" from Young Children Magazine, 2001. www.alfiekohn.org.
- The National Network for Child Care to read "Can You Praise Children too Much?" by Marilyn Lopes, UMASS, at www.nncc.org
- The Family Education website at <http://school.familyeducation.com> for information to

share with families.