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

Purpose of session:	The goal of this session is to explore the ways that praise is different from encouragement and to share ways that afterschool staff can use this information in guiding children's behavior.
Materials Needed:	Large sheets of easel paper, markers Handouts 1. Connecticut After School Network Quality Self-Assessment Tool (CT-QSAT) – Relationship Section 2. 65 Ways to Say "Good for You"
Welcome/ Housekeeping:	Perform introductions, state the session topic, how long it will last, when/if refreshments will be served, and the location of restrooms. Thank the host.

Trainer Tips: *A welcome sets the stage for training. Be sure to thank the host agency for providing meeting space and/or refreshments. Sharing housekeeping details such as the location of restrooms and the schedule of activities prevents interruptions during your session. Letting people know when food will be served helps participants to stay focused. Introduce any new participants or guests so all feel comfortable.*

Opening Activity:	Imagination Travel: a fun and easy game that does not require any materials and can be played in any setting (and it is one staff can use with children). Divide the participants into approximately 4-5 groups.
	1) "Think about different places (England, China, the moon) and time periods (Victorian Age, Ming Dynasty, the future) that would be fun to visit. Cost is no object! Use your imaginations! Pick a time and place and plan a trip. Your plan might include: meals, games to play, tourist attractions to visit, decorations, music to listen to, souvenirs to collect, etc. Examples include:
	    1) Victorian England – plan a tea party, read "The Secret Garden", play croquet, plan an interview of Dickens;
	    2) Safari in South Africa – listen to animal sound tapes, pack a lunch for the trail, use stuffed animals to create a jungle, paint a savannah scene."
	Tell participants: Brainstorming is a method of shared problem solving by rapidly generating a variety of possible options. Nothing is too silly or farfetched. You have five minutes to generate some activities.
	When five minutes has passed ask each group to spend one additional minute selecting their top 3 ideas to share with the larger group.
	Allow five minutes more for the groups to share their plans with the whole group.
	
	As presenter it is your task to <u>praise</u> the responses. Each group will receive praise for their efforts but each group will receive a different <u>type</u> of praise.
	1) First group gets generic but enthusiastic comments such as "Good work!" "Wow!" "Impressive!"
	2) Second group receives "I" statements such as "I'm so proud of the ideas you thought of!" "I liked the way you were working!"
	3) Third group receives "You" statements such as "You're on track now!" "You thought it was hard but you did it!" "You make it look easy!"
	4) Fourth group gets specific statements/questions. "How interesting! Tell us how you decided on that time and location?" "What were you thinking about when you came up with that idea?"
	5) Fifth group will receive statements/questions that generate reflection. "That's clever! Did you think this was an activity you could do so well?" "What did you enjoy most about this activity?" "Did you learn something about your colleagues?"
	
	If you have a small group of participants you can combine steps 2 and 3 or use the 5th group statements to cover all the participants.

Trainer Tips:	*1) Ice breakers can be used for introducing a topic, team building, or tension reducing activities. Make sure you include a debriefing time so participants understand the purpose of the activity.* *2) There are different techniques for dividing an audience into smaller groups. The simplest is to ask participants to form a group with others seated nearby. People do not need to move but they will be with folks they already know. A second method is to ask participants to count off "1,2,3,4" and join their matching numbers to form a group. This is useful if the activity needs space or is a high noise level activity. It also requires participants to join with people they may not know. Use of either technique will depend upon the task the group is to perform.* *3) During the activity listen for the noise level. A decrease in volume will indicate that participants are ready for the next step. This is a good time to ask if groups are ready to share or if they need a few extra minutes.*
Debrief (1st Activity):	This is a fun activity and can certainly be used with children and youth to generate program planning ideas but the presenter should draw attention to the different responses given to each group. Explain to participants: 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 <u>external</u> praise and can create anxious children who feel that all their effort must be to <u>please</u> adults without specific guidelines on <u>how</u> to accomplish this. 3) The last 2 groups received questions that asked participants to be more <u>reflective</u> 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 <u>internal</u> praise that is not dependent upon adult reinforcement. 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.
Trainer Tips:	*It is important to debrief after an activity so that participants understand the purpose of the activity as it relates to the topic. Adult learners want to understand why they are being asked to learn something that may be new to them.*

CT-QSAT Relationships	**1.Connecticut After School Network Quality Self-Assessment Tool (CT-QSAT) – Relationship Section** (see handout) I. Explain <u>Self-Assessment</u> to participants II. Programs that support the strong relationships are examples of high quality programs. <u>Human Relationships</u> 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 met these goals. Item #4 - Adults are actively engaged with the children/youth as observed through their enthusiasm, interest, and interactions. • Staff acknowledge children and youth when they cooperate, share, care for materials or join in activities. • Staff often show appreciation and encouragement. • Staff teach children and youth how to communicate cooperate.
Lecture:	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. I. Ask: Why praise children? Is there a purpose to praise? 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 approximately 10-15 praise phrases. (All phrases will have value as the workshop progresses.) (Trainer tip: This question asks participants to reflect on their own experiences using praise. This technique recognizes participants' expertise and provides a platform to incorporate new learning.) II. Two Types of praise – (as you describe the types of praise return to the list participants generated to identify statements that fit this category).

a. 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."
   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."
b. 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.
   f. 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.

c. Ask: Can praise be bad? Can you have too much of it?
   a. Positive comments to a child are good but:
   b. To really be effective praise should be focused.
   c. There can be "too much of a good thing" if used

unwisely.

d. There has been a great deal of controversy regarding the use of praise which we will cover next.

III. Self-Esteem Movement

a. "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.

b. 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.

c. The multitude of studies show that high self esteem has no effect on improving grades, reducing violent or self destructive behavior, or even career achievement.

1. Dweck & 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.

2. Meta-analysis of praise studies determined that overly praised students

- Demonstrate
  - Increased risk aversion – reluctant to try new things
  - Lack of perceived autonomy – little independence
  - Shorter task persistence
  - Do "eye-checking" with teachers
  - Use inflected speech – answers have the intonation of questions.

- Become
  - More competitive
  - Image conscious
  - More interested in tearing others down.
    - Praise "Junkies"

1. The absence of praise must mean failure.

2. Learn to do only those things that please others and do not follow their own interests.

d. Praise as celebration

Marshall Rosenberg, founder of the Center for Non-Violent Communication writes, "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.   Your only purpose is 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 you feel inside about their action, and,
3) what inner need of yours was fulfilled 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.)*

IV.   After school program staff can use meaningful praise to:
1. Help children identify and name positive behaviors;
    1. Unless positive behavior is clearly articulated many
        children will not know what you mean.
        1. Teacher: "I expect good behavior."
        2. Child: "What IS good behavior??"
    2. 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.
    1. Draw the child's attention to good models of behavior.
        "Watch me while I talk to…"
    2. Follow with "Did you see how I…"

Group Activity Option 1:	Rephrasing Positive Responses. (See handout "65 Ways to Say 'Good for you'") *(As presenter you have the option of doing this activity in groups or 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?
Trainer Tips:	*Discussing the choices provides an opportunity for cooperative learning and group problem solving. It will also reinforce the implementation of praise techniques – especially if these ideas are new to the participants.* *(This activity is one that staff could use with older children or youth.)*
Group Activity Option 2:	After the presentation post a large (newspaper-sized sheet) with Standard #5 written on it in a convenient area such as a staff lounge or the program office. Leave post-it notes or a marker near the poster and encourage staff to make comments directly on the sheet. Leave this up for just a week or two.
Trainer Tips:	*Posting a sheet in a staff area will encourage staff to reflect and to discuss the topic. Encourage staff to use Post-its or markers to make additional comments or to ask further questions directly on the sheet. This also provides an opportunity for those folks who need more time to formulate their thoughts or who are reluctant to speak up in a group session to share their ideas.*

Questions:	Ask: Where do we want to take the children we work with?
	  After school staff has an impact on the type of adult the children will become. When we are <u>intentional</u> 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.
	
	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?

Trainer Tips:	*Reflective questions help participants to internalize the workshop content and make it their own.*

RECAP Material	Return to the list generated early on the reasons for praise.
	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 adult approval.

For More Info go:	There are several sides to the issue of praising children. For one point of view read Alfie Kohn: Five Reasons to Stop Saying "Good Job!" from Young Children Magazine, 2001. www.alfiekohn.org. Visit the National Network for Child Care to read "Can You Praise Children too Much?" by Marilyn Lopes, UMASS, at www.nncc.org And check out the Family Education website at http://www.school.familyeducation.com for information to share with families.