

# CHILD CARE

plus +

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Supporting Inclusion in Early Childhood Settings

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## + Encouragement: I CAN Do It!

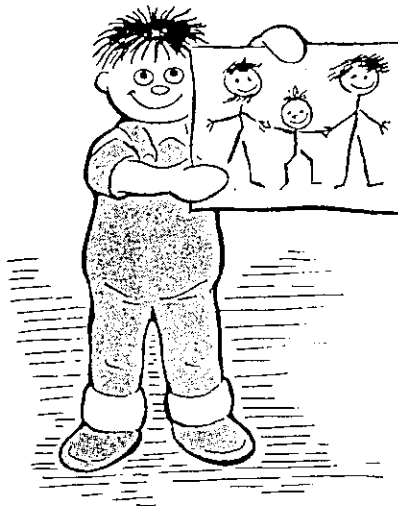
Encouragement is a way of interacting with children that gives them meaningful reasons for their behavior and practical ways to reflect on how they feel about it. (*You worked on your Lego castle until it was finished; how do you feel about what you have done?*) The use of encouragement reflects the belief that all children have strengths, that children have an inherent desire to learn, and that children benefit from respectful interactions with adults to help them develop positive self-esteem and build upon their emerging self-control skills.

Encouragement builds upon praise. Praise is intended to help adults focus more on appropriate and less on inappropriate behaviors, control children's behavior by rewarding positive behaviors, and facilitate children's self-esteem. These are important goals for young children, but praise alone does not actually meet these goals. *Wow, super, beautiful*, and the ever popular *good job* are frequently used words of praise, but these words really do little to help children understand *why* their behavior is great so they can repeat it. And many adults overuse these words, making them almost meaningless.

Descriptive praise like *Wow, Ben! You're sitting so quietly* does give the child information about what he did. But this type of praise is often given in an attempt to coerce other children to follow suit (*Me, too! I'm sitting quietly, too!*). This tends to create competition and, when overused, the added description becomes meaningless as well. Finally, praise is simply an adult's judgement of a child's performance and does nothing to help children learn the skills of self-control or develop internal resources to enhance their self-esteem.

Many children with (and without) disabilities come to our programs having learned to depend on praise. Encouragement is an opportunity to move children with

disabilities from an external to an internal source of self-esteem--a lifelong skill for developing and maintaining healthy self-esteem and self-control. These skills include **self-evaluation** (*I like the way I wrote my name*); the **disposition to keep trying** when faced with difficult tasks (*This block tower fell down again; I need to find a new way to build it*); **understanding consequences** (*There are too many children and toys in the way; I might get hurt if I run*); and an **acceptance of mistakes** as part of the learning process (*It's all right if I fall down when I try to hop on one foot; when I keep trying, I get better and better*).



Using encouragement gives tools to children so they can begin to evaluate and respond to their own behavior. You are using encouragement when you: 1) comment about a child's efforts (rather than about a child's product or behavior), 2) acknowledge the learning process (instead of focusing on the result), 3) help children recognize and monitor their own progress (rather than speaking continuously for the child), 4) model and promote self-evaluation skills (instead of your deciding when they have done a "good" or "poor" job), 5) encourage children to communicate about their learning process (rather than your guessing what a child's work represents), 6) allow children to explore/own their actions and feelings (instead of asking children to use certain behaviors simply to please you), and 7) help children develop the disposition to learn and challenge themselves (rather than conditioning them to work for praise from you). Of course it is important to individualize the language of encouragement to meet children's communication needs. With preverbal children, you can use positive body language and facial expressions as well as model the language of encouragement with a word (*proud*) or a simple phrase (*you tried and tried*).

It is important to watch for genuine opportunities to use encouragement. When you deliver your statements privately, you show respect for the uniqueness of each child. It is not a contest of "how much can you give" but of "how meaningful can you be." This is not an attempt to coerce other children to mimic another's behavior; it is a private exchange between you and the child. Encouragement is a strategy that respects and builds upon each child's ability to develop lifelong skills to promote self-control and a positive self-esteem. + shw

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## + FROM THE SOURCE

### Finding The Balance

To help children with disabilities learn skills or modify behavior, "rewards" may be used to reinforce the performance of goals or their individual plans (IFSP or IEP). The reward is intended to provide immediate reinforcement for the skill the child is learning and promote consistency across environments. For example, one of Ginger's goals is to *use appropriate signs to request her favorite foods--apple, cookie, juice, and sandwich*. Whenever she uses the appropriate sign, her caregivers and therapists make every effort to give her what she has asked for. In this example, food is a natural and encouraging reward for using the correct sign. Natural reinforcers are easy to use but are not always suitable or available.

Sometimes, food (cookies, cereal, candy), stars or checks on a chart, and stickers are used to "reward" a child for sitting still or completing a task, like putting a puzzle together or zipping his coat. These are not natural rewards. Comments like *good sitting still, nice job on that puzzle, or I like the way you zipped your coat* are examples of praise being used in the same way. In either case, the child may become dependent on an adult to judge her accomplishments or behavior instead of learning to judge her actions for herself.

For child care providers who use encouragement and try to avoid the overuse of praise, a conflict with a specialist (or parent) may arise when praise or external rewards are being used to reinforce a child's behavior. The child himself may come to rely on this process and be slow to respond when it is changed in any way. Actually, there is almost always room for encouragement along with whatever other method is being used. And when there is disagreement about how to help children learn, try using the following simple process:

- Listen carefully to the specialist so you understand what the real goal is for the child.
- Explain your beliefs about encouragement and its impact on young children's self-esteem and self-control.
- Work together to provide a balance of praise/rewards with encouragement.

What might a balance look like? You might keep using the stickers, but let the child decide when her effort warrants having one. You might combine clapping your hands when Gordon stacks three blocks with encouraging comments such as *Gordon, you stacked the blocks!* Even when a child has limited communication skills, your tone, facial expression, and warm touch convey the message of encouragement. And, when you move in the direction of using encouragement more than praise/rewards, you are promoting skills a child can use all his life to feel good about himself and his actions. + slm

## + NOTES FROM HOME

It was "one of those days." You know . . . the kind you wish would just be **over!** We had just moved to a new town, lived in a motel for three weeks until repairs on our house were finished, searched for two weeks for a preschool/child care program for Quincy (our four-year-old with cerebral palsy), and I was up to my neck in a new job that had demands I was struggling to fulfill. Tired, discouraged, and feeling quite low, I picked Quincy up late . . . again. The equally tired teacher smiled at me and said, *The important thing is you're here, and Quincy is excited to see you. Hmmm, I thought, what a nice thing to say.* On the way home, Quincy asked me if I was okay. *Just tired, hon,* I said. To which she responded, *Mom, you sure try hard. Wow, I thought, that felt good.*

It wasn't until later in the evening that I realized that Quincy had made encouraging and positive statements to her father, to me, to our dog, Fudge (who has a sore foot), and even to herself. At first I thought sourly, *She sure didn't learn that from me the past few weeks!* Then thinking back, I realized I first noticed these kinds of comments from Quincy about two weeks after she started at **Funshine School**. I realized that I seldom heard a negative comment from her teacher either. She was always positive, even when she reminded me to try to pick Quincy up on time. I thought about how good the comments from the teacher and Quincy had made me feel today and vowed to make an attempt to follow my daughter's good example. One day at a time . . . +

## + MAKING IT WORK

### More Encouraging Words

Encouraging words that can be internalized:

- ☆ Wow, you really worked hard on that tower.
- ☆ Way to go! You kept trying and trying to put that puzzle together, and you figured it out!
- ☆ Outstanding. That's the word I think of when you tie your shoes by yourself.
- ☆ It is remarkable the way you can make friends.
- ☆ I knew you could do it.
- ☆ Bravo for all of us and the things we do!
- ☆ That was an important discovery.
- ☆ You look like you have something to say. . . .
- ☆ What you did was very responsible.
- ☆ What an imagination.
- ☆ You're growing up.
- ☆ You tried hard.
- ☆ She trusts you.
- ☆ How do you feel about that?
- ☆ Tell me about what you are doing.
- ☆ What careful work.
- ☆ How did you figure that out?

Encouraging actions that show unconditional acceptance:

- ☆ A hug. ☆ A wink. ☆ A smile. ☆ A pat. ☆ I love you. +



## A Pat On The Back For Mom

# + SPOTLIGHT: Encouragement At A Glance

Our words should be like a magic camera upon which a child cannot help but paint a positive picture of himself.

Haim Ginott



To encourage a child, talk about his or her:	You might say:	What happens:
<b>Interests</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Show me your favorite part of the book.</i></li> <li>• <i>I would like to hear about this creation you built in the sandbox.</i></li> </ul>	Encourages children to talk about their work and allows you to explore children's interests and concept development.
<b>Learning Process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>How did you make your play dough dinosaur?</i></li> <li>• <i>What did you do first?</i></li> <li>• <i>I wonder what made you decide to put spikes on his back.</i></li> <li>• <i>What else do you know about dinosaurs?</i></li> <li>• <i>What else would you like to learn about dinosaurs?</i></li> </ul>	Encourages children to take the lead in the learning process and teaches them a strategy for learning. Helps you identify differences in individual learning styles.
<b>Effort</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>You worked on that painting a long time.</i></li> <li>• <i>You had to pound hard to get that nail in the board.</i></li> </ul>	Encourages a focus on the process rather than the product.
<b>Accomplishments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Your blocks are stacked as high as your shoulder.</i></li> <li>• <i>I noticed a lot of red in your painting.</i></li> </ul>	Provides specific information without judging.
<b>Feelings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>As a child runs to you saying Look, look at my picture, you can respond by saying It seems like you feel very satisfied with your drawing.</i></li> <li>• <i>You are full of energy today; you must be excited about your birthday treat.</i></li> <li>• <i>Can you tell me how it feels to finish such a big project?</i></li> </ul>	Helps children identify and label their own emotions rather than depending on you for feedback.
<b>Progress</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I remember when it was hard for you to get a paper towel by yourself.</i></li> <li>• <i>Last week, you asked for help with your zipper, and today you did it all by yourself.</i></li> </ul>	Helps children see their learning over time and recognize self-growth.
<b>Self-evaluation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Was it easy or hard to sit in circle today?</i></li> <li>• <i>How do you feel about it?</i></li> <li>• <i>If you could do this over again, would you do it the same or different?</i></li> </ul>	Provides an opportunity for children to evaluate their own behavior and promotes the development of self-esteem.

+ SHW

## + WHAT DO I DO WHEN

**QUESTION:** *I'm confused! I just read in an early childhood journal that praise is not that good for kids. I've been praising kids every day for the nine years I've been in child care. Is praise something I shouldn't give any more?*



**ANSWER:** Advice on how to work with young children **can** be confusing, especially if it seems that there is conflicting information. In reality, there is nothing wrong with praise, it just does not do enough for kids. If your goal is to teach children to be in control of their own behavior and to build their self-esteem, you need to regularly do more than praise them and their behavior. That is where encouragement comes in.

As long as you are commenting about children's play, work, and other behaviors anyway, you may as well make your efforts count and include statements that 1) make note of their accomplishments without comparing them to others, 2) create an environment that inspires all types of achievements, 3) make children proud of themselves and raise their self-esteem, and 4) give children tools and opportunities to reflect on their own progress and develop internal resources for promoting positive self-esteem. This is what encouragement is all about, and the long-term results are impressive.

Encouragement can be used in almost any situation. Whether the child is the "best," the "fastest," or "perfect" is immaterial. Think about the comments you use with children. Do they follow the four simple "rules of encouragement" just listed? If they do, keep using them. If they do not—look for alternatives that do. + kmg

*(If you have a question about children with disabilities in child care settings, please send your question to CHILD CARE plus+.)*

## + RESOURCE REVIEW

**Character Development: Encouraging Self-Esteem & Self-Discipline in Infants, Toddlers, & Two-Year-Olds** by Polly Greenberg focuses on understanding children's development in order to respond to their emotional and social needs. The writing style is "reader friendly," with many examples and metaphors used to help present the information. Even though it targets infants and toddlers, it is a useful resource for any early childhood professional who is looking for ways to enhance children's self-esteem and self-control. To order, call NAEYC at (202) 232-8777 or 1-800-424-2460, or write NAEYC, 1509 16th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-1426. +

*CHILD CARE plus+* is designed to support inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood settings by supporting child care providers, parents, and community service providers including social workers, therapists, physicians, teachers, and administrators.

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