

PARENT HANDOUT: PRAISING GOOD BEHAVIOR



Disruptive Behavior Skill 2

WHAT IS PRAISING GOOD BEHAVIOR?

- ▶ Praising Good Behavior is noticing when your child is acting in ways you like and showing your immediate approval and appreciation for those behaviors. This encourages your child to act appropriately, teaches them it feels good to get attention for positive behaviors, and shifts your attention from your child's misbehavior to desired behaviors.
- ▶ The best praise is very specific and direct, or what is called "labeled praise." That is, you let your child know in a clear and straightforward way what you liked about what they did. For example, saying "great job putting your clothes away" is better than saying "great job".
- ▶ Praise is also most effective when it comes directly after good behavior. Giving instant feedback helps your child connect their good behavior with your affection.
- ▶ While most praise is verbal, many children also like physical praise, such as a hug, high five, or pat on the back that shows your approval.
- ▶ This skill is effective with children of all ages, as well as for many different kinds of misbehavior.

HERE'S HOW TO PRAISE GOOD BEHAVIOR AT HOME

- 1 **Pay close attention** to what your child is doing so that when your child exhibits a good behavior, you see it! You are trying to "catch your child being good". Consistently paying attention to your child when they are behaving appropriately will make good behavior more rewarding for them. One way to do this is to **set aside short periods of time** each day to observe your child and practice Praising Good Behavior. Another is to **set an alarm to take a break** from your own tasks, check in on your child, and then praise good behaviors you see.
- 2 **Offer praise as soon as possible** after you see good behavior. If you delay telling your child that you like something they did, you will have less control over their future behavior.
- 3 **Be specific** about what you like (e.g., "It's awesome how you're working hard on your homework").
- 4 **Be enthusiastic and genuine** in your tone of voice. If common in your family, you can also give your child a hug, smile, or high five.
- 5 **Be consistent.** Start by giving praise every time your child follows an instruction. This gets you in the habit of spotting good behavior and your child in the habit of being noticed when behaving well.
- 6 **Avoid mixing praise with criticism** (e.g., "I love how you got ready for school on time today. Why can't you always do that?"). Focus instead on praising good behavior enthusiastically without any negative statements in order to increase the behavior you want to see (e.g., "I love how you got ready for school on time today!").

Some great times to Praise Good Behavior include when your child...

- a. **Follows your instructions or requests** (e.g., "Thank you for sitting down for dinner when I called you; "I appreciate you getting off the phone when your five minutes were up").
- b. **Does the opposite of a behavior you dislike** (e.g., "Great job keeping your hands to yourself"; "Thank you for not interrupting while I was talking"; "It makes me happy when you share with your sister").
- c. **Shows spontaneous good behavior**, such as following house rules or doing chores without being asked (e.g., "I love it when you clean your room without me telling you to").
- d. Begins to **follow a direction they usually don't follow**, or follow inconsistently (e.g., "Wow! It's awesome when you are able to play quietly on your own"; "You did a great job being nice to your brother).

PARENT HANDOUT: PRAISING GOOD BEHAVIOR TIPS



HOW CAN PRAISING GOOD BEHAVIOR HELP MY FAMILY?

- ▶ Many parents say their children misbehave to “get attention”. This is often true, because the more disruptive children are, the more attention people usually give them!
- ▶ When a child gets attention for a behavior, *good or bad*, it increases the chances of that behavior occurring again. You can encourage your child to behave by giving them more attention after a good behavior. For instance, if you show your child approval after they follow an instruction (“Thank you for doing as I asked”), your child will be more likely to do so in the future. Similarly, if you scold your child for whining (“Stop it!”), the whining will likely increase.
- ▶ Praising Good Behavior shows your child that you notice when they behave, increasing their motivation to do things you like. This helps you shift your focus toward times your child behaves, instead of times they misbehave. You can then use the power of your attention to its best potential.

COMMON PARENT CONCERNS

Why should I praise my child for behaving the way I expect them to?

We are all motivated by the type of attention we receive and what we gain for our efforts. Think of giving your child praise like “paying” them for doing their “job”. Even if they just do the minimum expected, they still want to be compensated for being “good enough”, just as adults get paid for going to work even when they don’t go “above and beyond”.

I’m busy, and it’s hard to pay attention to my child’s behavior this much.

Paying attention to your child’s good behaviors more than their misbehaviors is challenging and perhaps different from what you’re used to doing. With practice, your child should be able to act more appropriately and spend more time independently. Investing in short periods of time now will give you more time for yourself and more positive time with your child in the future.

I was not raised with praise, so this is uncomfortable. Children should do what they are told!

You are right that you should not “have to” praise good behavior. However, all children are different, and yours may respond better to positive attention than other strategies. Consider trying this skill and seeing if it helps motivate your child to behave better.

I already tried this, and my child does not respond to praise.

Many parents praise children, but not in the ways we suggest here. All praise is good, but little tweaks like looking out for good behavior, being specific about what you like, and giving praise immediately after good behavior can make it a more effective tool for you. Over time, gaining your praise and approval for good behavior will motivate your child and increase their self-esteem.

If I pay attention to my children when they behave the way I want them to, won’t they act out more when I’m not paying attention?

Everyone likes to be recognized for their efforts, especially when a relationship has conflict. This skill helps you and your child shift your focus to better behavior and how good it feels for both of you. Over time, as your child’s misbehavior decreases, they will become more motivated to behave in ways you like and to help maintain your improved relationship without as much praise.

