



Parenting during pandemic

Day 35: Giving children praise and how to maximise the effect

Giving children praise may sound like quite a straightforward thing to do. If they do something well then you tell them they did it well – isn't that it? Well there are a few more things to consider. For example, when should you praise children? Do you praise immediately or wait until they've done a few things? What should you praise for? Is it for everything they do well all day long or do you let some things go by without it and if so, which things? How should you praise children? What do you actually say?

Well, let's start with why we praise children. Praise is important for all of us because it recognises our achievements. Beyond this, however, praise also let's us know when we are meeting someone's expectations and doing things well. We all love praise and it's known to be a powerful motivator for people. For children, this is also the case. Children want your attention and if they are given praise for doing things well, they are more likely to do these things again to get your attention again. In psychological terms, praise reinforces the behaviours we give it for.

This leads us to what to give praise for. Well, we've just said praise reinforces behaviours and makes them more likely to happen again. This means if we give children praise for behaviours we want to see more of, we should see more of them because the children will want more praise. The actual content of what we give praise for is different for different children and we make allowances for age and stage when we decide what to praise. For example, we may praise a very young child for eating with a fork but a typical 10 year old would think this was a strange thing for them to be praised for. Essentially, we praise for things we know children are working on, developing and learning. We tend to do this quite naturally if it's about academic progress or sporting achievements but praise can also be used to reinforce behaviours we want to see more as well.

Regarding when we give praise, it is important for young children to be given praise as close to the behaviour we are trying to reinforce as possible. If not, we can risk them misunderstanding what the praise was for and the behaviour we were trying to work on isn't then reinforced. As children develop, they become more able to think about things across

time so praise can be given a bit later if necessary, although the effect is at it's strongest if given immediately.

One of the most important aspects of giving praise, which can easily be overlooked, is how it is done. Praise is by definition positive so should be given in positive terms. This may sound obvious but often as parents we are tempted to give praise and then immediately negate it with comments like "it would be great if you would do that every time" or "now remember to do that next time" or similar. These statements cancel out the positive of the praise statement and therefore the behaviour is not reinforced as we would want it to be. It works best if children do something well and we tell them they've done well and leave it at that.

We hope these tips are helpful. Well done on managing another day off school and we hope you will join us again on Monday.

Please contact us with questions, comments or topics you'd like to see covered. We'd love to hear your feedback.

Wishing you a safe and healthy path through this pandemic.