

PRAISE POINTERS TO ENCOURAGE A GROWTH MINDSET

The ways parents and teachers express praise make a lot of difference in whether that praise is encouraging and motivating. Effective praise helps develop a “growth mindset” in which young people recognize that they can learn and grow through effort and practice.

	Make sure praise is:	This...	...is more encouraging than this:	Why?
P R A I S E	Purposeful, specific and sincere	“Great game! You really passed well to your teammates!”	“Great game!”	Being concrete reinforces those behaviors. If, however, you both know the player didn’t pass well or it wasn’t a great game, then this isn’t sincere. The praise won’t help the young person learn.
	Reinforce behavior and effort, not “natural” intelligence	“Congratulations! I know you studied really hard!”	“Congratulations! You’re really smart.”	The first option focuses on an action that can be maintained or improved. If you praise someone because of something fixed (such as “being smart”), it’s harder to cope with failure.
	Attainable and realistic	“That is a beautiful picture. I love the colors you picked!”	“That picture is amazing! It could go in an art gallery.”	Inflated praise can backfire. It gives the impression that you have to meet exceptionally high standards, which you know you can’t always do. That undermines motivation.
	Information rich	“I love the salad you made. It has a nice mix of flavors and colors!”	“I love your salad!”	Giving more detailed information reinforces strategies that can be used when similar situations come up in the future.
	Self-focused, not in comparison to others	“You made a lot of progress in correcting grammatical errors.”	“You did much better on this than many other students.”	Praising in comparison to others may motivate when we always win. But we feel defeated when we don’t always win, so we aren’t motivated internally to learn and grow.
	Effort more than achievement	“I like how you took deep breaths to stay calm even when you were upset at your sister.”	“Thanks for not pushing your sister.”	The focus on effort emphasizes being able to grow and learn.

