

Lavish Praise Undermines Motivation

By: Stephanie Meegan, Author/Educator, for Tri-Town Council

All praise is not created equal. Lavishing praise, however well-intended, for innate qualities (such as attractiveness or intelligence) versus for deeds or effort, is not healthy. Instead of overdoing the automatic, “good job”, parents and teachers can offer specific feedback that speaks to what makes it a “good job”. For example, describe what you observe, “Coloring the sky red made the trees stand out.” Or ask a question, “How did you build the tower without it falling over?” Let the child assess the achievement, “How did it feel when your bat connected with the ball?” Point out cause-effect relationships, “Letting your friend choose the game helped him join the fun.”

Research also indicates that children who are repeatedly praised for being “smart” can develop the belief that performing well should be easy and frustration-free. If a task is hard, instead of exploring alternative strategies or putting in extra effort, these children tend to give up.

Intelligence isn’t static. The brain’s learning capacity expands with greater challenges. When young people realize that jumping into harder work or exploring new pursuits can actually increase their intellectual capacity, this understanding motivates them to take risks and embrace mistakes as part of the growth process.

Fortunately, specific feedback acknowledging hard work, creative problem solving, and overcoming obstacles, motivates and develops persistence and resiliency in our children. When we say, “You put a lot of planning into that project”... we send the message that “effort counts.” When we say, “The extra practice really helped the team move the ball down the court”... we send the message “practice makes progress.”

Tri-Town K-12 parents are invited to discuss more ways to encourage positive motivation and values during the upcoming sessions of *The Path of the Courageous Parent* on January 19th at Topsfield’s Emerson Center at 10:00AM and 7:30PM.

To register for one of the January 19th parent meetings, please call 887-6512 or e-mail programs@tritowncouncil.org or to learn more about research on praise, see the articles on the Tri-Town Council website, www.tritowncouncil.org.