

Why Encouragement is More Valuable Than Praise

Criticism and negativity are damaging. Kids who experience them tend to develop low self-esteem, fail to take the healthy risks required to learn, and suffer from depression.

In the late 1950s and 60s many mental health professionals and educators sought to teach healthier ways of relating to kids...more positive ways that focused on helping kids feel good about themselves.

The seeds of what I call the "Praise Movement" were sown.

As the years passed, more books, college classes, and seminars were created to help parents and educators build the self-esteem of American youth. As a result, many were taught to develop a new vocabulary around kids:

- That is so great!
- Wow...You are really special.
- I like it so much when you_____.
- You are so bright!
- Super!

To assist in this grand initiative, stickers were created with the same verbiage. Advances in science led to scratch and sniff stickers. Now we have more kids with low self-esteem, who fear taking healthy risks and who suffer from serious depression. Why?

Praise addicts kids to praise. Many fear losing it if they try something difficult that they might not be able to do in a praiseworthy fashion.

Many kids see praise as manipulative. As adults, most of us are wise enough to fear those who lather us with vague accolades.

Praise creates cognitive dissonance. Kids who feel badly about themselves feel anxious because praise doesn't fit their sense of self. To relieve the tension, they act out to confirm their view of self.

Praise distracts from what really builds self-esteem. Feeling good about ourselves does not come from being told that we are great. It comes from doing great things.

NOTICE AND DESCRIBE INSTEAD OF PRAISE

Experiment with an encouraging, "I noticed that you_____." Resist the urge to add, "and that's great!" Also experiment with mostly noticing effort and perseverance: "I noticed that you kept trying even though it was challenging."

There are few things more encouraging...and motivating...than seeing that we can overcome difficult tasks with a strong measure of grit. That's how we really help kids feel good.

Dr. Charles Fay