



Encouragement and Praise

Praise and Encouragement are different.

Praise is an expression of approval and commendation, and is about *external* –“from others” –reward.

Encouragement is the expression of approval and support; it is the act of giving hope or support to someone. Encouragement is about developing *internal*—“*inside of me*” –*sense of worth and motivation*.

Praise is about the end result. It is an award (physical or verbal) for a job well done. Praise, being about the end result, can only be about *achievement*. Many times praise comes across as empty or even false to a child, since it often has no relation to what they actually did and instead is about adults attempting to build a child's self esteem; praise, in this instance, can feel judgmental and/or insincere.

Children can become reliant on a parent or teacher's praise, and only seek to achieve something if there is only praise involved (especially a material reward). Because praise is about other people's judgment about one's work, the child who *only* receives praise doesn't learn about improvement, altruism¹ or self-motivation.

Encouragement is about effort, improvement and mastery. It focuses on what has been contributed (effort, strengths, energy). Encouragement can be given any time, not just when something is finished. Encouragement is not about judging the end result.

Encouragement is also about expectation: For example: next time your child is working on something, you could say: “I know that you will try hard and do your best. I expect this of you and I will support you in your effort.” Do you see how this is different from waiting until they are done, and then saying, “Good job with that!”

Praise is about your judgment of your child's actions: “You did your best/worst and you succeeded/failed. Here is your reward/punishment.” But don't think praise is bad--it's just not enough.

Praise works best when combined with encouragement. Praise without encouragement can lead to discouragement or perfectionism. A discouraged child is one who may whine, disrespect, and/or tantrum to get that praise--even when not earned. They are addicted to that external judge of worthiness, without having learned about internal motivation for improvement. And a perfectionist constantly struggles to prove their self worth, always needing an external reward for validation.

There is nothing wrong with acknowledging a job well done. But if you are relying only on praise, and not using encouragement, then your child won't learn about things like:

1. Trying harder
2. Setting goals
3. Working on something again, that didn't come out how they hoped the first time.
4. Failing isn't the end of the world; it's a step towards self-improvement.

How you can *encourage* your child:

1. Show genuine interest in what your child is learning. Ask questions rather than lecture.
2. Listen to your child when they talk about their interests and what they are involved in.
3. Offer to help (but back off if they want to do it on their own)
4. Give specific praise for a job well done (think of praise as a **part** of encouragement).
5. Demonstrate faith in your child's abilities and character.
6. Say: "I know that you can do it. I know that you are a smart/talented/etc. person and you will succeed at this."

-
1. "Extrinsic rewards undermine altruistic tendencies in 20-month-olds."

By Warneken, Felix; Tomasello, Michael

Developmental Psychology. Vol 44(6), Nov 2008, 1785-1788.

"The current study investigated the influence of rewards on very young children's helping behavior. After 20-month-old infants received a material reward during a treatment phase, they subsequently were less likely to engage in further helping during a test phase as compared with infants who had previously received social praise or no reward at all. This so-called over justification effect suggests that even the earliest helping behaviors of young children are intrinsically motivated and that socialization practices involving extrinsic rewards can undermine this tendency."