



## USING LABELED PRAISE

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Please note that resources such as this are intended to offer guidance and suggestions. However, no claim is made that the information provided is appropriate for any specific child or family. Many families will find this information helpful and sufficient for addressing child rearing issues. Others will not. Parents are encouraged to talk with their child's pediatrician or seek help from a mental health therapist if needed.

**Rationale:** When encouraging healthy and positive behavior in children, it is good to focus on rewarding positive behavior. Responding only or mostly to misbehavior, even if done right, is not always the most “complete” way of improving your child’s behavior. So, it is key that you praise your child when s/he does good things. In other words, you want to catch your child when s/he is being good and use a specific type of praise to teach him/her that you like the positive behavior.

### **Steps for Using Labeled Praise:**

- 1) **Identify positive behaviors:** You probably spend a lot of time thinking about what you wish your child would stop doing. It is equally, if not more, important for you as the parent to spend some time thinking about what you want your child to be doing. By being clear in your own head about the positive behaviors that you would like to see (or see more of), you’ll be better able to teach and encourage those behaviors. One way of doing this is to identify the opposite of problem behavior. In other words, what else would you like your child to do instead of the misbehavior? To help you figure out positive behaviors that are the opposite of misbehavior, a worksheet is attached to this handout.
- 2) **Use “labeled praise”:** Any praise is good, especially for young children, because more often than not they like attention from adults. To may praise even better, you should use ***labeled praise***. This means telling your child exactly what s/he is doing that you like. For example, if your child puts her toys away, instead of just saying, “Thank you,” you could say, “Oh, thank you! I love it when you pick up your toys!” By telling your child what you like about his/her behavior, it teaches him or her what is expected.
- 3) **Be excited when using labeled praise:** Try to be as animated and positive as you can when using labeled praise. Use an excited voice, give your child a pat on the back, and so on. This helps your child notice what you like.
- 4) **Catch your child being good:** Often, when children are playing quietly, doing what they are supposed to be doing, or are otherwise “out of your hair” you may find that you simply let them be. However, this is the *perfect* time to use labeled praise to encourage more positive behavior. This shows your child that positive behavior results in positive attention from you.
- 5) **Praise more than you correct (the “4 to 1” rule):** It can be easy to fall into the trap of spending most of your time correcting misbehavior, especially if your child is “high spirited.” However, research shows you are more likely to see positive results if you praise more than you correct. A good rule of thumb is that you should use labeled praise for positive behavior 4 times for every 1 time you respond to misbehavior.



Sometimes children are doing things that you might not *think* to praise, but if you would like to see your child doing something more often, use the opportunity to praise them!

**Here are some examples of specific, labeled praise.** Remember that these can be accentuated with smiles, enthusiasm, and physical affection.

-Thank you for playing quietly!

-I like it when you clear your plate.

-Thanks for listening and doing what I asked.

-I love it when you get dressed all by yourself!

-Nice job taking a deep breath when your little sister was bothering you.

-Thanks for stopping when I told you to stop.

-Hooray! You picked up all your blocks!

-Good work paying attention to your homework.

-I like the way you are keeping your hands to yourself!

-Very nice work \_\_\_\_\_!

-Good job \_\_\_\_\_!

-I like it when you \_\_\_\_\_!

-Thanks for \_\_\_\_\_!