



MUSIC IN PRACTICE

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Sue Hunt

The Right Kind of Praise

Praise is a good thing, isn't it? We're always told that the children should be praised. After all, we want to improve their self-esteem. BUT, did you know that praising your children for their intelligence can make them anxious and unprepared to deal with failure, creating a generation of Praise Junkies.

Yes, praise IS good but it's all about using the right kind of praise.





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Claudia Mueller and Carol Dweck, researchers at Columbia University, conducted studies on over 400 fifth graders in comparing children who are praised for their intelligence and with those who are praised for their focus and hard work. One randomly selected group was told, "You must be smart at these problems." The rest of the students were told, "You must have worked really hard on these problems." Subsequent tests the students who are praised for their effort to improve their scores by at least 30% of the students who are praised for intelligence actually got worse by 20%. When children were allowed to choose a task, those who are told they were smart chose questions they knew they would do well on, whereas those who are told that they had worked hard chose harder tasks that they thought they might learn something from.

Next the students worked on some really challenging problems. Again they found the students who had been praised to their intelligence, lost confidence in their ability and they soon began to struggle. When the problems were made easier again these students still did poorly, whereas the students who are praised for their efforts and focus continued to improve.

Finally when they were asked to report on their scores anonymously, almost 40% of the intelligence praised students lied. Apparently they were so concerned with their performance that they couldn't admit mistakes while only 10% of the students praised for their focus and hard work embellished their results.

Here are some useful strategies you can use with your own children. **Make sure that you praise the focus rather than the results.** With a little work your repertoire will grow.

No. 1: You really studied for your test and the marks show that you really read the notes, and tested yourself on them. What a result!

No. 2: I like the way you kept on trying all sorts of strategies on that puzzle until you finally cracked it.

No. 3: That was a long hard bit of homework. You stayed there and gave it all you had. You really focused and kept right on working till it was completed. I'm proud of you.

No. 4: I love the way you have taken on that tough project. It will take a lot of work what with all that research and practice you will need to do. Think of all the exciting things you are going to learn along the way.

No. 5: For those students who gets top marks without trying: That piece was way too easy for you. Let's do something more advanced that you can really learn from.



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No. 6: Finally, what about the student who doesn't do too well even though he works hard? I liked the energy and work you put in. Let's have another look at it and see if we can make sense of what's still puzzling you.

We want to keep students focused not on any "natural" ability that they may or may not have, but on the process of learning – their ability to stay with it and figure things out. It is not with ability, but with focus and tenacity, that your children's horizons will become truly unlimited.

"I do not think that there is any other quality so essential to success of any kind as the quality of perseverance. It overcomes almost everything, even nature." John D Rockefeller, the world's first billionaire, who was famous for being able to focus so deeply that no one could interrupt him for up to 5 minutes at a time.

----- *Sue Hunt* -----

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