

ENCOURAGEMENT VS. PRAISE

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As Rudolf Dreikurs said in his book, *Children the Challenge*, "Children need encouragement like a plant needs water." To thrive, children need an authentic understanding that are capable, accepted, and are valued for who they are (not who we want them to be). Encouragement teaches children that they belong and can make a difference, and are important members of our families and/or communities.

Praise and encouragement are often confused. So, what is the difference between encouragement and praise? Quite simply, encouragement is focused on the child, the process and the effort. Praise is focused on the adult, the product and the result.

Here are some examples:

Encouragement

"Thank you."

"How do you feel about _____."

"You really worked hard on that."

"Tell me about that."

"That must have been difficult."

"You must be proud."

Praise

"Good girl."

"I'm impressed."

"Excellent job."

"I really like it."

"You're better than that."

"I'm proud of you."

In parenting workshops, the question that comes up almost every time is, "Is it wrong to tell my child that I'm proud of them." The short answer is, "No," as long as your child is getting a healthy dose of encouragement. Praise is like candy. A little chocolate here and there is a nice treat. What is important to remember is that too much praise puts pressure on children to perform for others, fear judgment and to seek approval. Children who experience encouragement learn to identify their own strengths, and to value their own efforts, learn from their mistakes, and gain a real sense of connection and appreciation for who they are.

Here's a way to experience this for yourself. Create a list of common "praise" statements that you may give or hear others give. Create a similar list of encouragement statements (remember to focus on asking questions and making observations on the child's efforts and processes). Once you've created your lists have a friend, your spouse, or partner read them off to you slowly. Take notice of what you are feeling, thinking and deciding as they are read to you.