

## Language & Learning

### Positive Parenting

#### Using Praise Effectively

Children increase behaviors that get our attention, whether the attention is pleasant, happy, excited, or even angry. The behaviors you praise in your baby will tend to be appropriate. When your baby smiles, plays with a toy or engages you in a communication exchange, you tend to respond with enthusiasm. That is the beginning of praise. As your baby develops more control over actions and behaviors, you will want to encourage cooperation in eating, willingness to go to bed, or sitting in the car seat on a drive. If you pay attention to behaviors that you want to encourage, you will find yourself praising them.

When your baby is deaf or hard of hearing, you have to remember that using praise has no effect if the baby doesn't know it is happening. Your baby needs to see your face, attend to your voice, or look at your signs. Your baby needs to connect your praise to the behavior. You know what you are praising, but does your baby? As with other types of positive parenting, think about the behaviors you are encouraging and the language that naturally accompanies them. "You are in your seat. Good job." "You ate your cereal. Yummy." Learn and emphasize that language each time you see the appropriate behavior. Move into your baby's field of vision. Point to the car seat and the baby. Point to the empty cereal bowl and lick your lips. Your smile of encouragement is nice, but when your baby understands what you are encouraging, then you will see it happen again.

Parents want their babies to grow up knowing that they are loved, no matter what. Children are not judged as good or bad based on their cooperation. What we praise, or don't praise, is a child's behavior. When you praise the act, you give your child some guidance about exactly what you liked. If you say, "Good!" when your baby hands you a juice bottle instead of throwing it, your baby knows that you are pleased. If you say, "You gave me the bottle. Good job." with a big smile as you hold up the bottle and point to it, then your baby knows that giving is a good idea. It doesn't really matter, when children are very small, whether or not they know at that moment that the alternative behavior - throwing - is "bad." You will be dealing with throwing at some point, but why call attention to it when it didn't happen?

Telling your baby what behavior you liked is called descriptive praise. You describe just what you see and feel. "Good walking. By yourself!" You name the behavior so that your baby knows exactly what you liked. You are genuine, not gushing. A scribbled crayon picture has many colors, and you really like it. "You are the best artist in the world" is a lot less meaningful than "Many colors! I like it!"

#### Descriptive Praise



Standing by yourself!  
So big!



You are drawing.  
Pretty Colors.

At first, describing feels like a lot of language to learn, for parents and for babies. Start by commenting on behaviors such as standing or drawing. As you read in the section about choices, keep a list of words you want to sign or emphasize when you speak. Doing so can help you to quickly learn to communicate. Now add to your list words you can use for praise, or to expand the name of the behavior, such as “I like it. Pretty colors.” Learn to talk about things that might actually happen in your family, or that you love to see your baby do, such as “Walking to daddy! Wow!” If you are signing, let yourself learn the language you want gradually as your baby does more and more appropriate things.

Remember to match your facial expression to what you are saying or signing. If you are excited by what your child does, show an excited expression. To be sure that you are not the only one “in on” the communication, call attention to the act or items being praised, emphasize the important language, and add gestures to help make the message clear.

Situation:	
Infant hands mommy the cup to request some more.	Nice asking. You want more! (Hold up the cup).
Toddler entertains herself with the kitchen Tupperware while dad cooks.	You are having fun! Playing by yourself. Daddy likes that. (Point to the objects)
Baby takes a bite of food after much coaxing.	Good eating! MMMM. Yummy carrots. (Lick your lips)
Toddler hands daddy a small screw he finds on the carpet.	Thank you! Not a toy. Good job. (Put the screw up high.)