

## CHILD-PARENT-RELATIONSHIP (C-P-R) TRAINING

### Encouragement vs. Praise—Session 8

#### ✦ Rule of Thumb: "Encourage the effort rather than praise the product"

**Praise:** Although praise and encouragement both focus on positive behaviors and appear to be the same process, praise actually fosters dependence in children by teaching them to rely on an external source of control and motivation rather than on self-control and self-motivation.

- Praise is an attempt to motivate children with external rewards. In effect, the parent who praises is saying, "If you do something I consider good, you will have the reward of being recognized and valued by me."
- Overreliance on praise can produce crippling effects. Children come to believe that their worth depends upon the opinions of others. Praise employs words that place value judgments on children and focuses on external evaluation.

**Examples** "You're such a good boy/girl." Your child may wonder, "Am I accepted only when I'm good?"  
**of Praise:** "You got an A. That's great!" Your child may wonder, "Am I worthwhile only when I make As?"  
 "You did a good job." "I'm so proud of you." The message sent is that your (parent's) evaluation is more important than your child's.

**Encouragement:** Focuses on internal evaluation and the contributions children make—facilitates development of self-motivation and self-control. Encouraging parents teach their children to accept their own inadequacies, learn from mistakes (mistakes are wonderful opportunities for learning), have confidence in themselves, and feel useful through contribution.

- When commenting on children's efforts, be careful not to place value judgments on what they have done. Be alert to eliminate value-laden words (good, great, excellent, etc.) from your vocabulary at these times. Instead, substitute words of encouragement that help children believe in themselves.
- Encouragement focuses on effort and can always be given. Children who feel their efforts are encouraged, valued, and appreciated develop qualities of persistence and determination and tend to be good problem-solvers.

**Note:** Parent's voice should match child's level of affect; if child is excited about getting an "A" on a test, parent responds likewise with excitement in her voice, "You're really proud of that!" Use after-the-event celebrations (based on child's pride in achievement) instead of rewards (external motivators to get the child to achieve) to recognize achievement. In the above example, the parent could add, "Sounds like something to celebrate; let's make a cake!" or "You choose the restaurant, my treat!"

#### Encouraging Phrases That Recognize Effort and Improvement:

"You did it!" or "You got it!"  
 "You really worked hard on that."  
 "You didn't give up until you figured it out."  
 "Look at the progress you've made. . ." (Be specific.)  
 "You answer the questions about sports really fast!"

#### Encouraging Phrases That Show Confidence:

"That's a rough one, but I bet you'll figure it out."  
 "I have confidence in you. You'll figure it out."  
 "Sounds like you have a plan."  
 "Sounds like you know a lot about \_\_\_\_\_."

#### Encouraging Phrases That Focus on Contributions, Assets, and Appreciation:

"Thanks, that was a big help."  
 "It was thoughtful of you to \_\_\_\_\_" or "I appreciate that you \_\_\_\_\_."  
 "You have a knack for \_\_\_\_\_. Can you give me a hand with that?"  
 "It took a lot of courage to do that and you did it."

#### In Summary, Encouragement Is:

1. Valuing and accepting children as they are (not putting conditions on acceptance).
2. Pointing out the positive aspects of behavior.
3. Showing faith in children, so that they can come to believe in themselves.
4. Recognizing effort and improvement (rather than requiring achievement).
5. Showing appreciation for contributions.

Adapted from Dinkmeyer, D., & McKay, G.D. (1982). The Parent's Handbook. Circle Pines, MN: American Guidance Service.