

Descriptive praise

It's important to tell our kids what behaviours we like – what we want to see more of. You can think of your praise and attention as a currency. *Descriptive praise* is giving your praise and attention to your child – and telling them how they got it, so they know how to get it again. If someone gave you \$100 on the street, you'd be delighted, but confused. *What did I do?* This is the typical “good boy/girl!” or “well done!” – your child will be happy, but not always know *exactly* what earned the praise. If that same person gave you \$100 and said “I'm giving this to you because you said good morning when I passed you” ... well, you'd probably start saying good morning to passers-by more often – and you'd definitely say it to that person if you saw them again!

The example is a silly one, but your approval works in a similar way. When you see your kids playing quietly together, most parents will creep past, thinking *thank goodness, if I don't disturb them I have at least five minutes to get dinner started before the screaming begins*. Instead, if that parent goes in, crouches down, and says, “I love the way you're playing so quietly and well together, it makes me really happy to know I can trust you both while I cook dinner!” and went out again, you can bet both children will be feeling pretty good about themselves; and they know what they did to make it happen. ‘Playing well together’ becomes valuable to *them* – not just to you.

So, when you see a behaviour that you want to increase, take 15 seconds to go over to your child and tell them, genuinely, what you liked. At dinner, tell your partner how well they were playing together ***in front of them***. You can even say the specific things they did, e.g., “Thomas asked for the toy truck and Jane handed it over straight away, didn't you Jane!”

Descriptive praise is a quick and easy way to build the likelihood that behaviour will happen again. Think about one behaviour you'd like to see more of, try descriptive praise every time you see it for a few weeks, and watch that behaviour grow.

