

Positive Descriptive Feedback

Often times, adults say “good job” as an automatic response to a child’s actions, however these empty automatic responses teach children to rely on external feedback and can hinder a child’s internal motivation or confidence in their own abilities (Charner, 2013; Nelsen, 2006). When adults provide positive descriptive feedback to a child by using words that describe the behavior for which the child is displaying, they encourage and promote perseverance and place focus on effort and process, rather than adults approval or appraisal (Hemmeter, Fox, & Snyder, 2014; Nelsen, 2006). The key to encouragement is to begin with positive acknowledgement, while verbally recognizing specifics of the child’s efforts (Gartrell, 2007; Nelsen, 2006). **(EI 21.2 Guidance and Support; 24.2 Independence; 27.1 Focus)**

Here are some things you can do to provide descriptive feedback & encouragement and extinguish external feedback as the motivator:

Use sentence starters: “I see you”, “I hear you”, “I notice” followed by a description, for example, “I noticed when you heard the clean-up song, you started cleaning up right away.”

Notice and give feedback about efforts: For example, “Jennifer, you have counted all 17 blocks! I wonder if you will add any more.”

Encourage children to describe their own work: For example, “What can you tell me about your structure, Cayden?” “How did you build it?” Be ready to respond with more questions and comments based on what Cayden tells you.

When children are helpful, say “Thank You”: For example, “Thank you, Michele, for opening the door for me. By you helping, I was able to bring all the bags inside in one trip.”

Pay attention to details: For example, “Look at all those green polka dots you made! You mixed many shades of green and blue to paint this picture.”

Use Mirroring: Sit down next to Marlene in the block area. Observe her work and say, “Wow, I think I will try to stack the square blocks just like you are doing!” Imitate the way Marlene is building.

Identify a goal before responding: Decide what behavior, effort, or action you want to acknowledge, for example, “You are learning how to tie those shoelaces. Last week you had trouble getting them tied, but this week you did it without a problem.”

References:

Charner, K. (2013). 10X: "Good Job" Alternatives. *Teaching Young Children*, 7(1).

Gartrell, D. (2007). “You Really Worked Hard on Your Picture!” *Young Children on the Web*, 1–4.

Hemmeter, M., Fox, L., & Snyder, P. (2014). *Teaching pyramid observation tool for preschool classrooms manual, research edition*. Baltimore, Maryland: Brookes Publishing Co.

Nelsen, J. (2006). *Positive discipline*. New York: Ballantine.

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