

The Key to Building Your Child's Self Esteem

by on NOVEMBER 21, 2011



Have you ever experienced a child who's afraid to try, or gives up mid-way through an activity, or a child who must always win? How about a child who lowers their head when corrected? Each one of those children has the same issue: low self-esteem. If you see your child in any of those descriptions you might be scratching your head right now thinking, *low self-esteem? But I say "good job" and "well done" all the time!*

The Two Types of Praise: Global vs. Specific

Did you know that there are two types of praise?

One type is like a hot air balloon. It leaves a child with a sense that they've been filled with foundationless praise, or hot air. The other form of praise creates the cement that binds high self-esteem to a child for a lifetime. Educators, psychologists and therapists have known for a long time about the two types of praise, global ("hot air") and specific ("cement").

So now, after 15 years of heaping ample amounts of praise on a child to try to create high self-esteem, we come to find out that a child regards all that praise as baseless and foundationless because they don't understand what they did to be "smart" or how to replicate it again and again.

Why You Should Avoid Global "Hot Air" Praise

The backlash from giving ample amounts of global praise can cause a child to feel doubtful about himself and his abilities. It causes him to either give up half way through an activity, or causes him to not be willing to begin the task at all. It can also cause him to think he's only worthy when he wins, so he comes unglued when he doesn't win.

Why does this happen?

Global praise doesn't share the details of what created the success a child is being praised for. It doesn't tell her what made her "smart." She becomes fearful that she won't be able to recreate what she's being praise for—her smartness. She becomes afraid that the "secret that creates smartness inside

of her” will magically disappear, never to come back again, so she decides not to try.

Specific praise, on the other hand, focuses on the details, the effort and any obstacles a child has overcome in order to gain success and praise. Specific praise fills in the blank for a child. It specifically tells her how she arrived at being “smart” or successful in this circumstance.

How to Use Specific Praise to Build Self Esteem

Here’s an example of the difference.

Global, “hot air” praise: “I know you lost the game, but you did a good job sweetie!”

Specific, “cement” praise: “I know it isn’t fun to lose a game. You got 2 more homeruns this week than you did last week, because you practiced 5 days this week!”

The outcome from the praise is also different. Global praise makes a child hungry for more praise, because there’s no substance in the praise. To a child, global praise feels like an empty container that continually needs to be filled.

Specific praise teaches a child that working hard is a good thing, and that you don’t need others to know when you’ve done a good job, because you can see it yourself.

Specific praise shows children that there’s nothing wrong with failure, because failure is what teaches you about success.

Specific praise creates the kind of self-esteem that helps us all weather life’s storms. It’s the invisible shield that protects us from other people’s negative opinions.

The solid self-esteem that’s created by specific praise allows a person to cast aside another’s rudeness, bullying, or gossip. And it fosters a person’s courage, which allows them to be a risk taker, a much-needed skill in the adult world.

Using specific praise really is the cement that binds high self-esteem to your child for a lifetime. Just thought you would want to know!

<http://proactiveparenting.net/articles/the-key-to-building-your-childs-self-esteem>