



Do you praise your children or encourage them?

May 2017

Many people view encouragement as another term for praise. Although encouragement and praise both focus on positive behaviors, the purpose and effect of praise is quite different from that of encouragement.

Praise is a verbal reward. Praise emphasizes achievement, is earned and is given for being the best or producing something superior. The message praise gives a child is, "If you do something I believe is good, then you will have the reward of my admiration." Praise is given for well-done tasks or good behaviors. In effect, praise is a method of controlling children in an attempt to make them live up to particular standards.

In contrast, encouragement is freely given for effort and improvement. It focuses on strengths and acceptance. Encouragement recognizes contributions in an effort to help children feel useful and positive through contributing to the common good. It points to the individual as good enough as is; that he/she doesn't have to be superior to others to be of value. Encouragement motivates children through internal stimulation and it avoids placing value judgements on them.

In contrast to praise, encouragement can be given when children feel sad and when they feel they may not be able to meet some of life's challenges. Encouragement instills faith and belief in the child's capabilities.

Although encouragement is often given non-verbally through a smile or pat on the back, there are other times when encouraging comments are due. These differ from praise in these ways:

- Encouraging words show acceptance: *"I'm glad you're happy about your basketball trophy."*
- Encouraging words instill faith and confidence: *"It is difficult, but I know you can do it."*
- They focus on appreciating contributions: *"Thanks for your help. It would be very hard to complete this project without you."*
- They emphasize effort and improvement: *"I can see how hard you've been working."*
- They focus on assets and strengths: *"I really liked the chocolate cake you made."*

You and your family do not have to struggle alone. LCFS counselors help families generate hope and cope with life's challenges. Most insurance plans accepted; sliding-scale fees are available on a case-by-case basis. For more information or to schedule an appointment, contact us at lcfs_info@lcfs.org or 800-363-LCFS (5237). Discover LCFS and the services we offer at www.lcfs.org and www.facebook.com/LCFSIL.



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