

Engagement, Praise and Feedback to Support a Growth Mindset

Feedback and engagement to support growth mindset and growth strategies has a special theme to it.

If your child does well with praise your specific labeled praises can be attuned to these themes. If your child, like mine, is wary of praise your (non-praise laden) engagement and recognition can target these themes in a similar way. For us at least, we have found I can take my praise down a lot and my sincere engagement and observations can call attention to sufficient positive natural consequences to feel rewarding.

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL MOTIVATION

There is always room for healthy competition. Cultivating and communicating interest in our child's developing internal as opposed to external motivation, though, can help support self-directed efforts in the best case. In any case it can short cut power struggles over praise and mitigate fear of loss of support during setbacks.

Internal Focus	External Focus
Striving, Improvement, and Mastery (with others)	Achievement, Performance, and Victory (over others)
Can be more <i>cooperative</i> – improving, seeking help, and offering help	Can be more <i>competitive</i> – challenging others seeking betterment to be “best”
Failure can align with <i>having done</i> badly	Failure can align with <i>being</i> bad
Embracing <i>possibility</i> and facing vulnerability	Seeking <i>perfection</i> and “invincibility”

RECOGNIZING PROCESS OVER ABILITIES

Praising or recognizing the child's process rather than their ability or talents can help keep the focus on hard work, effective strategies, and perseverance in the face of challenge. This can help avoid sending the message that it's their personal fixed traits or natural talents that result in success. Resilience is learned from setbacks when setbacks are seen to result from a lack of experience or practice rather than a lack of ability. Authenticity and moderation go a long way toward our recognition being heard and trusted by our children. Enthusiasm may work well with some children and may seem inauthentic or even daunting to others. One of my children could not tolerate my enthusiasm (especially after she completed an effort) but she embraced my early low-key engagement and specific recognition of what I saw her doing at various stages in her process. While she didn't trust effusive praise (even saying when she got older that she felt manipulated by it) she did like to know she and her efforts were seen.

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Try Saying:	Instead of:
I see how hard you are working on that	You are so smart, you're good at that
I notice you are trying to work a little longer on _____ than usual and it looks like you are making a lot of progress	See I told you, you were good at _____. You got an A this time.
I saw you try several different ways to get the garbage down to the curb and you managed to get it all there even though it took several trips.	I told you, you were big enough to do the garbage on your own.
It looks like trying a new strategy really paid off.	See. I knew there was hidden talent in you.
I love the way you stayed on task, asked me for help when you needed it, and finished up on your own.	What a good kid.

RECOGNIZING AND NORMALIZING STRUGGLE

Our recognition and engagement can help normalize struggle and encourage our kids when they are working on something challenging. Hard work matters. We learn best when we are stretching ourselves. Mistakes are normal when we're learning new things. This type of recognition helps our kids develop an understanding and recognize from their own experience, how people gain knowledge, skills, and achieve mastery of new tasks.

Try Saying:	Instead of:
This next homework is hard, remember thinking things through slowly can help and thinking harder helps us learn.	This homework is particularly hard for you so just do your best (possibly signaling low expectations)
I saw you make some mistakes and that's actually good because it means we can look at that and do some things differently, so it goes better next time. That's how we learn.	You sure made a lot of mistakes but at least you got it done (with no perspective on how mistakes are helpful)
Ah you're right you will need to try again. Nobody gets to be an expert without repeat efforts. Try reminding yourself ..."I'm not good at this YET"	Just try harder next time (can signal low expectations or that they were not trying this time)

CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICAL FEEDBACK

None of us do things right all the time and we benefit from knowing how we can improve. Wise and constructive critical feedback allows kids to trust your motives, feel more confident in their capacity to improve, and understand what specific steps they can take to improve.

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Try Saying:	Instead of:
I am watching you try. I see you struggling. This approach isn't working really well for you because...	That's not right or that won't work (with no specificity to help with correction)
You mowed the entire lawn today like I asked and there are some spots that were missed. We can figure out how to make sure those areas get included...	You completely missed several areas of lawn today when you were mowing. (no acknowledgement of what was done or guidance as to how to do it better)
I want to make these suggestions because I can see the effort you are putting in and I know you are ready to take this next step.	Why did you stop there? I don't think you understood my request at all. (criticism without guidance)
Great, you have mastered _____ (skill). Now you can start working on _____ (next skill). (with concrete instruction to allow improvement)	I don't think that's the best you can do Or I know you can do better than that. (general criticism)
You can always come see me if you have questions or need help. (offer support where needed)	Sure, you struggle with reading out loud but playing the piano is a gift of yours. (unrelated praise to buffer criticism of another ability)
I am interested in your progress. Can you explain how you decided to do this this way? (clarify processes - If their reasoning is sound, recognize how their reasoning helped them develop a skill or complete a task. If their reasoning is flawed, recognize their effort in formulating an approach and offer to help trouble shoot so they can revise a plan for next time.)	That's right or That's Wrong (no focus on why they were right or wrong)

Based on *Feedback for Growth Strategies*

https://www.mindsetkit.org/static/files/Feedback_for_Growth_Strategies.pdf

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