

Encouragement vs. praise

What's the difference ?

As educators we strive to engage with children through interactions that are respectful, meaningful and help build healthy self-esteem.

By reflecting on the words and phrases we use when interacting with children we can create better outcomes for children

What is praise and how is it different from encouragement?

Praise has been widely used in early childhood education and care settings as far back as any of us would care to remember. Praise is generally taken to mean how we use words and phrases such as “good work!”, “great drawing Noah” or “I really like the way you’re sitting on the mat Alison”. For the most part, praise has been used with the very best of intentions by educators as a strategy to increase the self

-esteem of children. In recent times, however, research has discovered more about how self-esteem develops. Against what we believed in the past, we now know that praise doesn’t help build self-esteem rather, it is now accepted that the opposite is true.

Research has shown that self-esteem is not built by others saying ‘nice’ things to us but by individuals receiving feedback that allows them to have an accurate picture of what their own competencies and qualities are and having realistic goals for themselves based on what their ideal self would be like. It is through encouragement, not praise, that children have the opportunity to gain this perspective.

Quality Area five of the National Quality Standards focuses on Relationships with children. 5.3.1 Behaviour guidance strategies preserve the dignity and the rights of the child at all times.

When you want children to develop a healthy self esteem , celebrate and acknowledge their efforts, but do not praise them . Dr Louise Porter.

times

As educators we want children to feel good about themselves. We want children to be supported by their educators and to feel their support.

Below are the summarizing statements Alfie Kohn gives in his *Five Good Reasons to Stop Saying “Good Job”*, each of which are counterproductive to the EYLF learning outcome 1 - Children have a strong sense of identity:

1. Manipulate children
2. Creating praise junkies
3. Stealing a child’s pleasure
4. Losing Interest
5. Reducing achievement

THE BEST RESPONSE TO ‘GOOD BOY’



(Cartoon by Peter MacMullin and inspired by Alfie Kohn as provided by Louise Porter PhD in *Not in praise of praise* 2009)



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The Early years Framework ask us to be responsive to the needs of children and for children to have a strong sense of identity.

Belonging , Being and Becoming are integral parts of identity. (EYLF p. 21)

In early childhood settings children develop a sense of *belonging* when they feel accepted, develop attachments and trust those that care for them. When children feel safe, secure and supported they grow in confidence to explore and learn. (EYLF P.21)

Encouragement (sometimes known as *informative feedback*) differs from praise in how the views of each person in the communication exchange are made evident. In providing encouragement, educators remove their own thoughts/feelings from their comments and instead, focus the conversation on the child's thoughts/feelings. This removes us from what could be seen as a judgmental position.

Breaking the Habit

When looking to improve our practices, we often need to reconsider the way that we have done some things for years—we need to break the habit. Like breaking any habit, changing from using praise to using encouragement with children involves us rethinking how we do the most basic of everyday things, like our interactions, in particular the ones that are 'on the fly' or automatic.

For more information

Dr. Louise Porter— Not in praise of praise
<http://www.louiseporter.com.au>
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Encouragement Strategies

- **Observe play silently** Spend time in coming to understand what children's goals or interests in their play is before participating or offering support in other ways.

- **Use materials yourself**

By using the same materials children are using and in the same way, educators are not imposing their own ideas on to children.

- **Describe actions, materials and effort**

By describing what we are seeing in the way of actions, materials or effort we can avoid saying what we think of what we are seeing. This then allows children to make that judgment for themselves.

- **Ask open-ended questions (sparingly)**

Open-ended questions give more scope for children to respond rather than being lead to a 'right' or 'wrong' answer. A reflective point for educators to consider:

A good question is one you don't know the answer to.

Remember that even if we are being asked 'good' questions, no one like to be bombarded all the time. A conversation is not a string of open-ended questions.

- Pose "What if ...?" questions.
- Respond to children's conversational leads using simple acknowledgements "Hmmm", "Really", "I see", "Oh".
- Name feelings observed.
- Support children's problem solving.

