

# Encouraging Words



*Encouragement can help children feel good about themselves and their parents. But it can also be overdone. Helpful words show appreciation without sounding like empty praise or “things parents are supposed to say.” Here are some tips on encouraging your child.*

## Notice specific good acts and comment on them.

- *Tell your child how much you love her and how wonderful she is.* But she also needs to receive encouragement about specific actions. Instead of saying, “What a good girl you are,” try saying, “You put your book back on the shelf.” She will see her own action as helpful.
- *Pay attention to the things that your child gets right.* For example, if he usually pushes to the front of the line but remembers to wait this time, you might say, “I’m glad you remembered to wait to go down the slide when you saw Jason get to the ladder first,” along with a smile or a hug.
- *Use words to help your child become aware of her own approach to problems.* “I noticed Maria wanted to play a different game than you did, so you suggested playing her choice and then playing yours. You looked like you were having fun together.”

## Notice your child’s effort and be honest in praising it.

- *Support your child’s good intentions.* Rather than saying, “What a beautiful card! You’re a great artist!” try saying, “Daddy will really like the get well card you made.”
- *Be careful not to go overboard with praise.* Your child may begin to doubt your judgment if you constantly tell him that he’s the fastest boy or the best artist, especially if he knows others who are faster or who draw better pictures.

## Avoid compliments that insult your child or others.

- *Don’t praise your child in a way that sounds like criticism.* Saying, “You actually remembered to put your coat away for once” is not encouraging. If something your child has done is worth complimenting, let the compliment stand on its own.
- *Avoid insulting others while encouraging a child.* Saying, “You are a much better helper than your brother” may cause competition and resentment.

“I love you.” “I’m proud of you.” “I’m so glad you’re my child.” Children *and* adults feel good when they hear these words.

*These suggestions were adapted from:*

*Brazelton, T. Berry, & Sparrow, Joshua A. (2001). Touchpoints three to six: Your child’s emotional and behavioral development (pp. 222–224). Cambridge, MA: Perseus.*

*Work and Family Resource Center. (1996). Praising children [Online]. Available: <http://www.cpirc.org/tips/praise.htm#Praising%20Children> [Note: Link is no longer active.]*

## For related Web resources, see “Encouraging Words” at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tips.htm>.



29 Children’s Research Center  
51 Gerty Dr. • Champaign, IL 61820-7469  
Telephone: 217-333-1386 • Fax: 217-244-7732  
Toll-free: 877-275-3227 (Voice/TTY)  
Email: [iel@uiuc.edu](mailto:iel@uiuc.edu)  
Internet: <http://illinoisearlylearning.org>

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