

Mrs Dowdell's Parenting Pointers

Effective praise and encouragement

This week, I delivered my favourite session of the Incredible Years programme. It's really exciting to hear about the progress that the parents in the group are already making and I know that the effective use of praise will enhance all the great stuff they are already doing. So, what did we learn about how to praise and encourage our children more effectively? Here are some pointers ...

We need to make sure praise is specific and labelled; not just telling children they're wonderful (because often they won't agree) but telling them what we like about their picture, how proud we were when they stayed calm in a tricky situation, how helpful they are when they get their shoes on straight away. Our children need to know exactly which behaviours they are being praised for and then they're more likely to do them again. It is not possible to praise a child too much, as long as the praise is specific and labelled.



We need to remember to praise immediately. For example, we can thank them for coming to the table straight away, praise them for tidying their toys as soon as they've done it, recognise when they are kind or polite by telling them how much we appreciate it. We also need to keep praising them, even for the things that we feel they "should just know" how to do, then they'll keep doing them. Praise children's efforts or steps in the right direction, not just perfection or completion of a task. "Well done you tried really hard to do your coat up"; "Look how much progress you've made with your spellings"; "Thank you for coming upstairs when I asked you, now we can clean your teeth."



Try to ignore "secondary behaviours". For example when our child moans and whinges about putting the rubbish out, but in spite of the eye-rolling they put the rubbish out anyway, we need to praise them for complying with our request and ignore the complaining. Children are more likely to repeat behaviour that is noticed, so notice the good behaviour through praise and encouragement.

It's difficult to praise children after there has been a period of negative behaviour because we just don't feel like being nice to them. Sometimes it might not even be the children who have upset us. I have a saying, "don't let Mum brush your hair when she'd mad at your Dad!"

But, we need to try and put our negative emotions to one side, so that we can take time to notice our children's positive behaviours. The important thing is that our children constantly have the opportunity to try again and succeed. The most effective way to modify our children's behaviour is by noticing, praising and encouraging the good stuff. Sometimes, we have to remember to be the grown up and get over ourselves, in order to give them the chance to try again.

Got any questions? Need any help or advice? E-mail me at parenting@foundrylanprimary.co.uk