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*Listening, learning,  
and living together:  
it's the science of life.*

## **Praise or Encouragement<sup>1</sup>**

*Kate Fogarty<sup>2</sup>*

Building self-esteem in children is not about telling them how wonderful they are. Rather, it's about helping them feel good about their actions and accomplishments.

There are two kinds of feedback that adults typically give in response to children's behaviors. The first is encouragement, which fosters a child's sense of mastery and allows them to evaluate their own behavior. The second form of feedback is praise, which may have the counter effect to what adults intend. It can actually make children feel helpless and more dependent on others' feedback and approval. Praise tends to be judgmental, is based in competition, and is vague. It's often delivered publicly, and is associated with a finished product, rather than occurring during the preparation phase (Hitz & Driscoll, 1988).

Encouragement allows the child to evaluate his or her own efforts rather than compare himself to another child. It's specific, and occurs through the process of a child's step-by-step accomplishments toward a given goal (Hitz & Driscoll, 1988).

Examples of praise might be, "What a beautiful painting." Encouragement sounds more like, "I notice how you used a lot of bright colors in your painting." As a parent or teacher, you may often catch yourself saying, "Good job!" or "That's great!" to your children. This is only natural, as most of us recall hearing similar words said to us as children. Practicing

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encouragement is not about eliminating praise entirely from your vocabulary, but balancing comments of praise while using as much encouragement as possible.

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