

BROPHY'S GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE PRAISE

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Often in child care we focus on the Big Issues of our Profession — program development, needs assessments, intervention strategies — while the small details of our craft go unnoticed. Praise is a case in point. Most child care workers, myself included, give little thought to the type of praise they give or the effect this praise might have on their children. The Big Issue, praise as reward for positive behavior, overshadows the fine work of actually praising a child. Jere Brophy's "Teacher praise: A functional analysis" (1981) offers guidelines for effective praise. These guidelines, originally developed for the classroom but here adapted to the everyday milieu of child care, focus on specific attributes of the child's effort. Praise becomes more than blanket acceptance; it points children to those qualities and abilities which make their effort praiseworthy. The craft of praise is idiosyncratic, tailor-made for a given child in particular circumstances. Effective praise:

- is contingent to performance, and delivered after the task is complete ("You've finished setting the table? Well, let's have a look.");
- focuses on details of the task ("Why, you picked up all your books and put them away in alphabetical order.");
- is spontaneous and fresh, to suggest that the worker is paying attention to the child;
- rewards performance rather than mere participation ("I'm glad you joined in our game; you scored two goals!");
- provides feedback to the child about his/her ability or about the value of the task, rather than conveying status on the child ("David, you behaved very well during our groups; you listen carefully to instructions and that allows you to finish the projects with few mistakes.");
- has the child focus on his/her own performance, rather than on the performance of peers ("Well, let's forget what Nancy did and take a closer look at what you've done.");

- uses the child's past performance as a measure for the present, rather than comparing the child to others ("When we first played ping-pong you missed the ball quite a bit; now you hit it over the table most of the time.");
- is sensitive to the child's developmental level and limitations ("It's hard for a girl your age to make her own bed; the mattress is pretty heavy, but you sure tried to tuck the edges in.");
- attributes success to the child's effort and ability, ("These math questions were hard, but you stuck with them until you finished all your homework.");
- stresses the positive attributes of the task which motivate the child, rather than on outside factors which manipulate the child—for example, a reward or the satisfaction of the worker, ("You seemed to enjoy washing the dishes; you experimented with the bubbles, and played battleships with some of the plates and glasses.");
- directs the child toward the strategies he/she uses to problem solve and complete tasks ("Your work is very organized; first you put the big toys away in your closet, then you picked up the smaller toys and put them in the chest.").