

## "Praise" and "Rewards"

*What happens when there are no more treats at the end of the maze?*

"Good job!" it's the newest catch-phrase spoke by parents to their children, also known as *positive reinforcement*. To modify children's behavior, parents and teachers most often fall back on either rewards or punishments, or both. Along with telling your child "Good job!" many parents and teachers offer sticker charts, sweets, toys, priveledges, awards or money. In the long run, however, positive reinforcement, in these forms, do not work.



Offering rewards for performance and compliance grew in popularity after studies on mice resulted in a desired behavior. (ie The mice navigates the maze for the cheese). The excitement grew as these techniques, modified of course, were used to influence human behavior.<sup>4</sup> However, humans are definately more complex than mice. Yes, if humans were offered a reward, indeed those offered the reward were more compliant. However, people who are offered rewards to complete a task, put in less effort and creativity than those who are offered no reward.<sup>2</sup> Rewards stifle risk and creativity because the only motivitor is the reward itself. What happens when the reward is no longer meaningful or no longer available? The child has no internal motivation to complete the task or behavior. Rewards teach children to ask what's in it for them and they end up focusing on how to get more and better rewards. In the long run, the reward will not succeed in sustaining the behavior.

Children who are given rewards as motivation tend to be less sure of their own ideas, easily influenced to back off their original position and change their mind, less persistant with difficult tasks, and less likely or sure to share their own ideas with others for fear of rejection and failure.<sup>1,2</sup> In a study conducted by Joan Grusec at the University of Toronto, young children who were frequently praised for displays of generosity (ie "Good sharing" or "I'm so proud of you for helping") tended to actually be less generous on a daily basis than other children were.<sup>1</sup> For example, a children may share a sandwich with another child for very different reasons. One child may be doing it to attract praise, another may be doing it because she knows her friend does not have enough to eat. The latter motive, is of course the most altruistic. Instead, if your child does something nice for someone else focus on the effect that deed has on the other person. "Abigail was so happy when you shared your sandwich with her. She really enjoyed it."

A secure sense of self is something all parents want for their child. Self-esteem means that children feel good about themselves. The key is they feel good about themselves in the presence or absence of your verbal approval. If you continually give children vocal praise for their acheivements then they become to depend upon your vocal approval to continue to feel good about themselves.<sup>1,3</sup> Since, self-esteem is not acquired at once but over time, parents can strengthen their child's self-esteem by spending time with their children, taking a cue from their interests and seeking information and involvement in that area of interest.<sup>3</sup> Self-esteem is more likely to be fostered when children are esteemed by the adults in their life: treated respectfully, asked about their opinions and having their opinions and views taken seriously.<sup>3</sup>

**Our mission is to enrich children's lives through innovative support, education and enhanced family and provider services. Our programs put families at the center of a community of support services.**

It is important to give children realistic and meaningful feedback. Success and failure are both normal parts of life and should both be addressed as they arise. Success is not possible all the time and it is important for children to know that you will love them, no matter what. Give unconditional love and support instead of saying, "Good job".<sup>1,3</sup> Depending upon the situation, this might be an opportunity for your child to work on problem solving to create new strategies to increase success.

Moreover, another component of self-esteem stems from how well children get along with their peers and members of their community.<sup>3</sup> Children who have strong social-emotional skills will develop strong relationships in their community and have a healthier self-esteem than those who have a difficult time socially. Consequently, due emphasis needs to be placed on the child's social-emotional health- this is the foundation for all other learning.

Cheering your child on can be a hard habit to break and can really seem cold-hearted at first. But focus on what you can offer in its place, which will be infinitely more effective.....

- Give children real work to do that presents a challenge- caring for a pet, helping prepare meals, etc.<sup>3</sup> Children receive a real sense of accomplishment from real work along with the value and contribution as a member of a group. Expect your child to be capable and let them try new and challenging activities. As a rule, give your child one more new responsibility each day.
- Say nothing or say what you saw- narrate. "You put your shoes on by yourself" so your child knows you noticed.<sup>1</sup>
- Talk less and ask more...."How did you figure out how to make a pulley?"<sup>1</sup>
- Children need acknowledgement and positive feedback so focus on how they feel about their accomplishment, rather than how you feel.<sup>4</sup>

Remember, life isn't all or nothing. There is no need to swear off the words, "Good job!". However, the tips above will go much further in helping your child feel truly appreciated and able.

1) "Five Reasons to Stop Saying "Good Job!" Alfie Kohn, Young Children: September 2001  
[www.alfiekohn.org/parenting/gj.htm](http://www.alfiekohn.org/parenting/gj.htm)

2) "The Risk of Rewards" Alfie Kohn, ERIC Digest: December 1994  
[www.alfiekohn.org/teaching/ror.htm](http://www.alfiekohn.org/teaching/ror.htm)

3) "How Can We Strengthen Children's Self-Esteem?" Lilian Katz, ERIC Digest: Summer 1995  
[www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content2/strengthen\\_children\\_self.html](http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content2/strengthen_children_self.html)

4) "Rewards and Praise: The Poisoned Carrot" Robin Grille  
[www.naturalchild.com/robin\\_grille/rewards\\_praise.html](http://www.naturalchild.com/robin_grille/rewards_praise.html)

#### Resource available at our office:

##### Books

*Beyond Self-Esteem* by Nancy Curry & Carl Johnson

*How to Raise Emotionally Healthy Children* by Gerald Newmark, PhD

*How to Talk to Your Kids So Your Kids Will Listen & How to Listen So*

*Your Kids Will Talk* by Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish

*A Hooray Kind of Kid* by Barbara Reider

*Me, Myself, and I: How children build their sense of self* by Dr. Kyle Pruett

*Redirecting Children's Behavior* by Kathryn Kvolcs

##### DVD

*Unconditional Parenting: Moving from Rewards and Punishment to Love and Reason* featuring Alfie Kohn



## Alpine Events

### June

20-Day of the Young Child at Lake Tahoe Community College. A FREE event, including lunch, courtesy of the Kiwanas. Sponsored by Choices for Children and El Dorado First 5. Over 40 booths with fun, free activities for the kids. For more information call 1-877-541-5848

26- Storytime at the Library 5-8pm. This is a free event. Indian Tacos available for purchase. Call the library at 694-2120 for more information.

### July

July 2-August 13, Summer Library Program, Thursdays 10:30 am-12 noon. 694-2120

18- Alpine Kids take a trip to Virginia City! Call Edie at 694-2934 for more information.

25- Music in the Park by the library at 5:30 pm. Free. Call 694-2120 for more information.

### August

15- Alpine Kids go horse back riding and BBQing at the Antelope Pack Station in Mono County. Call Edie at 694-2934 for more information.

24- First day of school

**Did you know that children spend almost 80% of their awake time out of school? Help your child spend that time in both fun and enriching ways. Have them circle their interests and pursue them over the summer.**

Aerobics, archery, badminton, baseball, basketball, bicycling, boating, bocce ball, canoeing, croquet, dance, darts, street hockey, fishing, football, frisbee, golf, gymnastics, hiking, horseback riding, horse-shoes, hula hoop, jogging, judo, juggling, jumping rope, karate, kayaking, kite flying, paddle tennis (ping pong), paddle boating, roller skating, skate boarding, soccer, softball, swimming, tai chi, tee ball, tennis, volleyball, water skiing, yoga

Cake decorating, batik, beading, calligraphy, candle making, carpentry, cartoon drawing, crochet, clay sculptures, doll making and doll house making, doodle art, embroidery, free-hand drawing, kite making, knitting, model building, mural painting, needlepoint, oil painting, origami, photography, pottery, print making, puppet making, quilting, sand sculpting, sewing, tie-dyeing, watercolor, weaving

Making instruments, singing, song writing, musical instrument lessons, face painting, magic tricks, play writing, gardening, astronomy, bird watching, build a bird feeder, butterfly watching, geology (collect & classify rocks), visit a museum, make a craft using only materials from nature, study trees, shrubs & flowers, learn about whales, camping, cooking, making candy, making ice cream, making home movies, play games (backgammon, card games, checkers, chess, monopoly, etc), complete a puzzle, genealogy (study your family history, make a tree, write down stories your family tells you), geography (pretend to take a trip somewhere and plan what you will see, do, and eat), learn another language, learn sign language, read books about famous people, read "classic" books (ask each parent and grandparent about their favorite), research your town's history, write a letter, have a puppet show, keep a journal, learn to play harmonica

**Visit the library (which will give you tons of information on all of the activities above)**





## Day of the Young Child

A fun filled day

Free children's activities

Free lunch- courtesy Kiwanis

**June 20, 2009**

At Lake Tahoe Community College

10 am - 2 pm

There will be over 40 booths with free activities

Don't miss out!



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