

Alpine County Choose Civility Campaign

(An initiative of the Child Abuse Prevention Council and County Superintendent of Schools)



December Focus:

Accept and Give Praise

I have a wonderful friend who is great at so many things but she finds it hard to accept a compliment. I've praised her talents and actions in public and in private over the years and each time she brushes my compliments off saying things like "Oh, this old thing? I've had it for years" or "Oh it's nothing." I finally talked with her about this because my feelings were getting hurt. I really do admire her and I want her to know that. I also think others should know how amazing and far-reaching her talents are. She admitted that compliments and praise make her uncomfortable. I countered that I get a little hurt when she avoids my compliments because I am being honest in noticing her strengths and my praise comes straight from my heart. She promised she'll try harder to graciously accept my compliments with a simple "thank you" and I'm happy to report its working! We are both happier in our communications now.

According to author P.M. Forni, a compliment is a gift. When my friend brushed off my praise, it was almost like she was returning the gift I was giving her.

Even Mark Twain said "I can live for two months on a good compliment." So, we can help others feel good about themselves by praising them. Let's think back to our childhoods and remember how important it was for our parents and teachers to praise our efforts and accomplishments. Remember how validated we felt and how we wanted to do more and try harder? An Arab Proverb reads, "Insults should be written in sand. Compliments should be carved in stone" thus illustrating the power of both.

Sometimes people aren't aware of their strengths and talents until we point them out with our praise. This can help reveal to people how wonderful they really are. As Robert Orben said, "A compliment is verbal sunshine." For all of us, but children in particular, praise can nurture self-esteem thus strengthening emotional well-being. Isn't that a wonderfully civil thing to do?

Based on Dr. Forni's book and my own personal experience, here are some tips for accepting and giving praise:

- Be sincere when you praise someone. Really mean what you say.

- Be specific in your praise. Instead of a general “good job” let the person know exactly what was wonderful about what they did such as “The quilt you made has such intricate detail. I’m amazed by the work you must have put into it!” “Wow, your book report makes me want to read that book! You really made the plot sound exciting.”
- Go ahead and give praise or a specific compliment instead of assuming someone already knows your feelings. Praise can make a person’s whole day much brighter.
- Try accepting praise with a simple “thank you” or “thanks for noticing”. Remember that brushing off a compliment makes the person giving praise feel awkward and like you’re refusing a gift they’re trying to give you.
- Did you know that many surveys have shown that employees rank appreciation and recognition at the top of their lists of what motivates them at their jobs? A culture of praise and appreciation can make the workplace, classroom and home a positive place to be.
- Children can be taught how to accept and give praise. Start by modeling and then role playing. Sometimes our youngest children’s shyness may prevent them from responding with a “thank you” but they will learn over time. It’s okay for them to respond with a smile until they’re ready to say thank you. It is, however, important to show them it is nice to acknowledge the person who is giving a compliment or praising them.

Books about accepting and giving praise:

Yang the Third and Her Impossible Family by Lensey Namioka

This book is a great book about differences and respect. It also deals with accepting and giving praise. Children from fourth grade and up will enjoy this story about a girl who moves to America from China.

Find Something Nice to Say: The Power of Compliments by Debby Hoffman and Kathy Chamberlin

The Compliment Quotient: Boost Your Spirits, Spark Your Relationships and Uplift the World by Monica Strobel