

How to Give Praise That Works Worksheet

Surely praising a child is really good way to boost their self-esteem and make them feel good about themselves? Actually praise is not as straightforward as it might seem. And sometimes the most well-meaning praise can lead to some unintended reactions.

But don't just take my word for it. Try the following exercise and see for yourself.

Below you'll find a description of five different hypothetical situations in which someone praised you. Please read each scenario and note down your reactions to the praise you received.

Situation I

You've been taking an adult education course on a subject you are very interested in. After a lively class discussion in which you participate, another participant comes up to you and says, "You're so articulate and intelligent. You really have a brilliant mind."

Your inner reaction:

Situation II

You have an unexpected guest for dinner. You heat a tub of fresh vegetable soup, add some leftover chicken, and serve it with boil in the bag rice. Your guest says, "Wow, delicious. You're a brilliant cook!"

Your inner reaction:

Situation III

You've had a new hairstyle and it's quite a change for you. You meet your mother for lunch sporting your new "do". She exclaims, "My goodness. That haircut is fabulous! I much prefer it to your old style!"

Your inner reaction:

Situation IV

You've only recently learned to play a new board game and you're still fairly confused about the rules. You're playing one night with some friends and you win. One of your friends comments "Hey, you've really mastered that game. You pick things up so quickly!"

Your inner reaction:

Situation V

You're learning to ski and so far you still get tangled up in your skis when you get off the chair lift. This morning you're on a lift with someone staying in your chalet that you met at breakfast. You manage to get off the chair lift in one piece. Your new acquaintance remarks "Wow, you're brilliant for a beginner."

Your inner reaction:

If you've completed the exercise you've probably discovered that along with the good feelings that praise can lead to, there can also be other more problematical reactions.

- Praise can make you doubt the person doing the praising. ("Hhmm, articulate and intelligent? She must be pretty inarticulate or else she's just lying to flatter me.")
- Praise can lead to immediate denial. (I am not that intelligent and if he knew me better he'd know that.)
- Praise can be threatening. (Oh no, what if the next thing I say isn't so articulate and intelligent?)
- Praise can lead you to focus on your weaknesses. (Well I may be articulate on that subject but I'm not intelligent – I can't do math to save my life.)
- Praise can lead to anxiety and interfere with activity. (Oh dear, I'll never make another point as well as that. I better stay quiet in future.)
- Praise can be experienced as manipulative. (Hhmm, what are they after?).

Avoid these problems with evaluative praise by swapping to some of the suggestions for descriptive praise that you've heard in my *How to Give Praise that Works* Audio Download.