

# JCCCA

## Parent Page

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### How Much Praise Is Too Much?

"That's the most beautiful picture I've ever seen -- wow!"

"It was very nice of you to say please."

"I'm so proud of you for hitting that home run in the game."

As parents, we've become addicted to praising our kids. But as we try to make them feel good about themselves 24-7, we actually may be harming them. When you applaud your child for things that aren't true achievements (she goes down the slide or hangs up her coat without your help), she'll begin to expect praise all the time, which diminishes its power. "Overpraising a child can get her hooked on success and celebration instead of being satisfied by her own accomplishment," says Elizabeth Hartley-Brewer, author of *Praising Boys Well* and *Praising Girls Well*.

Even if your praise is sincere, you may not be using it the right way. If your compliments tend to be about you ("I think you did a great job") rather than about your child ("I'll bet you're proud of yourself"), she'll start to look for your approval every time she does something.

In an interview with Alexandra Barzvi, Ph.D., Clinical Director, Institute for Anxiety and Mood

Disorders at the NYU Child Study Center, she contends that praise is certainly good for children, but some kinds of praise are better than others. She suggests too much



unspecific praise, or overpraise, can become meaningless. General praises like "you're such a good child" that's not connected with a specific behavior, doesn't mean much.

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### My Provider is Special because...

What makes your provider special to your child and your family? We would like to hear from you.

Send a small paragraph telling us the name of your provider along with your nomination describing their outstanding performance and efforts to:

JCCCA  
Provider of the Month  
P.O. Box 280853  
Lakewood, CO 80228

"We are becoming praise junkies as parents," says Jenn Berman, PhD, a marriage and family therapist and author of *The A to Z Guide to Raising Happy and Confident Kids*. "We've gone to the opposite extreme of parents from a few decades ago who tended to be more strict, and now we overpraise our children."

By giving kids heaping portions of praise, parents think they're building their children's confidence and sense of self -- when it may be just the opposite.

"There is something about praising your child constantly that is belittling," says Berman. "There's an underlying message that the child has to get his parent's approval all the time and constantly look to the parent for validation."

"Somehow parents have come to believe that by praising our kids we improve their self-esteem," says Paul Donahue, PhD, founder and director of Child Development Associates. "Though well-intentioned, putting kids on a pedestal at an early age can actually hinder their growth."

"We should especially recognize our children's efforts to push themselves and work hard to achieve a goal," says Donahue, author of *Parenting Without Fear: Letting Go of Worry and Focusing on What Really Matters*. "One thing to remember: it's the process, not the end product, that matters."

Praising the effort -- not the outcome -- can also mean recognizing your child when she has worked hard to clean the yard, or cook dinner, or complete a history assignment. But whatever the scenario, praise should be given on a case-by-case basis and be proportional to the amount of elbow grease your child put into it.

## Social Complex

Janna Oberdorf wrote an article in *Parents* magazine that I thought might be of interest to parents of school children. She describes several challenges our children face when trying to "navigate" the new rules of school-age friendships which for most start in the first grade. For parents, it is heart wrenching to watch. For the kids, it is another life learning lesson they must work out on their own, (with a little help from us!).

***"Social Challenge: Best friend one day, mortal enemy the next. My kid has a "frenemy"!"***

One week they are practically inseparable, making BFF bracelets and walking arm in arm. The next, your daughter informs you she and her former soul sister are no longer talking. Fight the temptation to pick up the phone and call the ex's mom. The intimacy and comfort that your child feels with her pal make her the perfect person to practice fighting and making up with -- kind of like the dynamic between siblings. Of course, you should listen empathetically when your child is upset, but "most kids get over fights sooner and bounce back faster from hurts than adults do," says *Parents* advisor Michael Thompson, PhD, coauthor of *Best Friends, Worst Enemies*. So give your child the space she needs to work out issues, and offer guidance when you see an opportunity. If your child seems stuck, though, it's time to intervene. You can help by arranging play-dates with other kids.

***"Social Challenge: There's a mini queen bee in my kid's class."***

Don't worry; your child isn't starring in *Mean Girls Jr.* Though your daughter might talk about the "popular girls" or has even morphed into one of the elite herself, what

defines who's on top (and who's not) is always in flux. Kids are discovering the ins and outs of the idea of a social hierarchy, and they're also experimenting with the dark arts: gossiping, forming cliques, and excluding others -- but usually without malicious intent. "School-age kids are just beginning to understand the scope of their power over others," says Dr. Thompson. Here's where your guidance can help your child understand how to wield her influence kindly. It's a good idea to get your child involved in activities outside of school so that if things get rocky there's always another group of friends to fall back on.

***"Social Challenge: Birthday-party invitations this year? Very few."***

If your child feels left out, talk to his teacher and get her take on the situation. She's seen your kid in action and can give you the lowdown on what's going on in class. The good news is that it will probably take just a little coaching on your part to get him over this social hump. Work with him. Be straightforward about how things like whining or tattling rub others the wrong way. Confide in a mom who'll be happy to help subtly jump-start a friendship between your child and hers." *Parents Magazine* October 2007

## Make Silly Soup!

Here is an activity you can do on a cold winter day.

Let your child choose "ingredients" from all over the house. Anything kid-friendly that will fit in a giant pot is fair game. Have the child talk about what is in the pot. What color is it? What shape is it? What kind of texture does it have? Describe different ways to use the object or even compare the object to like and different objects.