

# Malden Public Schools Title I Parent Connection



## Giving the Right Kind of Praise

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When we praise our children, we have always done it with the best of intentions. We want to encourage them to keep going and trying. We want to help make them feel good and build their self esteem. It seems logical. However, according to research by Carol Dweck as described in her book, *Mindset the New Psychology of Success: How we Can Learn to Fulfill Our Potential*, we've been doing it all wrong.

Dweck and her team went into New York Public Schools to test 400 fifth graders. The researchers took the group of students through a series of tests. Here is what happened in each round of testing.

In the first round, students were given a non-verbal intelligence test consisting of a series of puzzles, which were easy enough. Students were given their score. Then, some of the students were praised for their *intelligence*. They were told, "You must be smart at this." Other students were praised for their *effort*: "You must have worked really hard."

In the second round, students were given a choice between a more difficult test and one that was easy like the first. Of those praised for their *effort*, 90% chose the *harder* set of puzzles. Of those praised for their *intelligence*, a majority chose the *easy*. Thus, when we praise kids for their intelligence or their talents, it is like we are telling them to look smart and don't take risks. However, it is when we take risks, take on more challenging tasks, that we then have the opportunity to learn more.

In the third round, the test was *difficult*. Thus, *everyone failed*. Those praised for their *effort* on the first test assumed they simply hadn't focused hard enough on this test. "They got very involved, willing to try every

solution to the puzzles," Dweck recalled. Some of the students even said this was their favorite test. Those praised for their *smarts* assumed their failure was evidence that they weren't really smart at all. It was difficult to watch this group of children as their anxiety and nervousness was clearly evident.

Finally, students were given an easy test similar to the first test they had been given. The students praised for their *effort* improved their score by 30%. Children praised for their *smarts* did about 20% worse. Dweck explains that when we praise children's effort it is something they can control while emphasizing intelligence takes it out of the child's control.

You can easily change what you have been saying to your children. Here are some tips for how to praise your children more effectively:

- *Be specific*. Instead of saying, "You're such a good baseball player," say, "You hit the ball really hard."
- *Praise their effort*. "You worked hard every night on those spelling words, and you did well on the test."
- *Focus on the process used*. "You practiced your spelling words all weeklong, and you got a 100% on your spelling test."
- *Praise should always be genuine*.
- *Encourage new activities*. Praise kids for trying new things, like learning to rise a bike or tie their shoelaces, and for not being afraid to make mistakes.
- *Embrace failure*. When they haven't succeeded at something, use it as an opportunity to talk about what they can learn from the experience, how can they practice to get better, and what strategies will help them succeed better next time.

