

## **A cautionary note on praise**

Many parents are in the habit of praising their child and that's not a bad habit to be in. Praise is well known to be beneficial to younger or older children by drawing attention to their good or appropriate behaviours and encouraging them to do more of the same.

These days, praise is often thought of as an essential self-esteem boost. Because of this, many parents are in the habit of feeling they need to praise their child in every endeavour, particularly when their offspring are struggling. Unfortunately, children praised in a somewhat indiscriminate manner can become so used to being given positive feedback that they become inattentive at evaluating their own efforts and don't cope well with receiving slightly critical feedback meant to improve their performance.

I think it is a good idea occasionally to step back from rushing in to offer praise, or even criticism to your child, but rather encourage them to evaluate their performance first. You can do this with report cards or when they step off a sporting field. Rather than rush in with positive or negative comment, ask your child what they feel about their performance and what they saw as their strengths and weaknesses. By doing this you are encouraging them to see the good elements and the areas of opportunity in their performance. You are also encouraging their independence and not making them reliant on others' feedback and reassurance.

Let's face it, as adults we don't have a cheer squad sitting in the corner of our office nor a coach always at our shoulder. To achieve success in life we need to rely on our own judgement about our successes, mistakes, and decisions to change anything. But it shouldn't always be about endless appraisal and analysis. Satisfaction often lies in not thinking about what we did for too long and moving on quickly from our great or not so great endeavours.

Parents need to start to step back from regularly judging children and encourage them to judge their own efforts. If we teach our kids the skills to assess their success and/or areas of opportunity, as well as not over-think things, we will be genuinely giving them an ability to be confident and capable in life.

© *Dr Judith Locke.*

*Judith is a Clinical Psychologist, teacher, researcher at QUT, and author of the parenting book "The Bonsai Child". She talks to parents around Australasia helping them to fine tune their parenting strategies to ensure their children have the qualities and skills to do well in life.*