

## Praise, Encouragement and Rewards

**Praise, encouragement and rewards are essential in teaching children and youth appropriate and desirable behaviours, as well as improving self-esteem and confidence. These three tools can be used as reinforcement to teach and shape new behaviours. Reinforcement is anything that increases behaviour (Cooper et al., 2020). When provided after a behaviour, praise, encouragement and rewards can act as reinforcers and increase the chance a behaviour occurs again. Giving praise is an easy and low-effort tool that when used regularly can have meaningful effects on a student's behaviours.**

### Praise

Praise is when you provide social reinforcement to your student. This can be telling them what you like about what they just did or simply saying "good job!" Praise helps students learn and understand which behaviours are appropriate and which ones are not. Everyone, including students enjoy reinforcement, and will act towards accessing things they enjoy, and almost all people enjoy praise. As a bonus, praise can improve student's self-esteem and overall confidence.

Praise can be used in any environment, for any behaviour, and can be socially appropriate for any age. For example, you can praise a young student by saying; "you did so great sitting nice and still during circle time," or praise an older student by saying; "you've been working really hard to get your homework done on time and you're doing a great job."

There is no such thing as giving too much praise. However, praise can become redundant if it is not done sincerely and descriptively. When non-specific praise such as "good job" is used too frequently or randomly, students may not understand what they are being praised for, or they may learn that they can receive praise for not doing anything.

### Praise to Decrease Challenging Behaviours

As previously stated, people will engage in behaviours that are reinforced. Praise can often act as social reinforcement, it can also be used to replace inappropriate or challenging behaviours with more appropriate ones.

Replacing behaviours through praise can be achieved by watching for appropriate behaviours, and immediately delivering praise. For example, if a student typically runs through the hallways, but you see them walking in the hallway; immediately tell

them something like; "I like the way you're walking in the hallway." The appropriate behaviour can be increased by praising them every time initially, then gradually fading the amount of times they are praised as they start engaging in that behaviour more and more often.

## Encouragement

Encouragement is similar to praise, however, it is used for effort rather than engaging in a specific behaviour. An example of encouragement is; "you did a good job working hard during clean up today." When encouragement is provided for effort rather than a specific behaviour it may increase motivation to work hard and improve effort in the future. Encouragement can also be used to prompt students to continue engaging in a behaviour. An example of encouragement used this way could include; "you're doing a great job with your spelling, and you're almost done, keep going!"

Encouragement is important for all students to boost confidence, but especially for some who have lower self-esteem. It is a great tool to use to get students to work hard and feel good doing it! It may even increase their resilience when problem solving in the future.

## Rewards

A reward is a consequence provided after seeing a desirable behaviour. It can be used as a supplement for praise and encouragement, rather than just giving social reinforcement it is providing something tangible to show they did something good. Most people enjoy praise, but some may find tangible or edible items even more desirable or reinforcing. Rewards can be given in the form of a treat, a small toy, time with preferred activity, such as iPad time, extra free time, etc.

It is important to remember, that rewards should not be used alone. Rewards delivered without social praise will not be meaningful and are not natural. When they are used too frequently, students may become dependent on the reward in order to accomplish the task or demand and become unable to engage in the desired behaviour without the tangible reinforcer. Therefore it is important to pair a reward with praise and encouragement.

## Provide Attention Only to Desirable Behaviours

It is a natural reaction to punish inappropriate and challenging behaviours. Inappropriate behaviours are more salient and obvious than appropriate behaviours, therefore, we are more likely to notice them and punish them. It is very important to pay attention and look for appropriate behaviours, so they can be reinforced. Reinforcement teaches what to do, punishment only teaches what not to do.

### Helpful Tips

- **When you notice a student doing anything good, tell them.** If you can praise and encourage students even a little bit every single day, those small words can have a significant impact on a students' behaviours and self-esteem. Remember to notice and comment when your student is engaging in positive behaviours.
- **Be attentive and look for the little things.** Effort, improvement, and progress are important to notice, praise and reward. Not every student is going to do something perfectly the first time, any effort or progress towards it should be recognized.
- **Every student is different.** Understand that no student is the same and praise should also be delivered differently. Praise does not have to be given uniformly across the class. Some students may be praised for sitting in their seat and some may be praised for finishing all of their homework. All desirable behaviours should receive praise.

### References

- Cooper, J. O., Heron, T. E., & Heward, W. L. (2020). *Applied behavior analysis*. Hoboken, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Praise, Encouragement & Rewards. (2006). In *raisingchildren.net.au*. Retrieved from <https://raisingstudentren.net.au/toddlers/connecting-communicating/connecting/>