

THE  GUIDE

**FILL YOUR CHILD'S
LOVE TANK
IN 20 MINUTES!**

Find out more:

www.family.org.sg/RacetoPraise

A Children's Day initiative by Focus on the Family Singapore.

JOIN THE RACE TO PRAISE!

Our conversations with our children these days revolve mostly around their academic performance — how they did in their tests, and how their friends did in comparison.

While it is important that our children are thriving in school, we also need to be intentional about affirming them for all that they are doing right and have done well!

We hope to journey with you to give your child healthy and encouraging memories of home and family that would last a lifetime.

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OUR GRADE EXPECTATIONS

Avoid the parent trap of wanting the perfect kid

I once read a blog by a student who said that on the first day of school in Secondary One, she got questions like “*What’s your PSLE score?*” instead of “*What’s your name?*” When we become adults, the questions move to “*What do you do?*”, “*Where do you live?*” and so on. Consciously or subconsciously, we’re constantly sizing up others and getting sized up in return. And unfortunately, we sometimes do it to our children too. “*How does my child compare to this other kid?*” “*Why can’t he be more like his brother?*” “*She doesn’t seem to exhibit any talent unlike other kids.*”

It’s no secret that we live in an achievement-centred society where we often place demanding expectations on both ourselves and our children. How then can we avoid the trap of becoming overtly critical but provide positive support in encouraging our children’s growth?

Affirm your child’s unique qualities

Every child needs validation and nurturing to fully develop into a healthy adult. Children need validation and nurturing particularly from both dad and mum, and we need to learn to affirm them for *who* they are — their character and values — above and beyond the accomplishments and their outward successes.

YOUR CHILD IS A GIFT, NOT JUST A RESPONSIBILITY. TAKE TIME TO INTENTIONALLY OBSERVE AND VALUE HIS OR HER ADMIRABLE TRAITS:

- Does he/she display confidence in new situations?
- Does he/she have a great imagination?
- Does he/she have a strong desire to be around others?
- Does he/she love following the rules and ensure others do it?

Affirm your child's unique identity

While over-praising children has its negative effects, effective affirmation should stem from the expression of our unconditional love for our children as individuals. It's the type of love that says *"You matter to me because you're my son,"* or *"You're good enough because you're my daughter."* While giving praise and validation for accomplishments is important; giving praise and validation for effort is more effective. Affirm your child not just for their values and character but also their identity as mom and dad's beloved. After all, they're more than a list of achievements, let alone a set of grades.

THE PARENT- COACH DIALOGUES

Want to find out more on being an effective parent? Check out our [Parent-Coach Dialogues](#) and be equipped with age-specific parenting tools.

www.family.org.sg/PCD



ME, MY KID AND THE EPIC MARATHON CALLED SCHOOL

Give your child the momentum to keep going

If we liken life to a race, then the entire academic journey our kids undergo should be called an epic marathon. From the time they enter Primary 1 to the process of streaming and the great PSLE hurdle, we coach our kids through their studies, hoping that they would succeed academically, and ultimately get a decent job to support themselves and their families. While there are many acclaimed methods of studying and brain fitness classes that can boost our kids' capacity for knowledge, one of the most essential factors to help them go the distance is the presence of a positive home environment. How can we encourage lifelong learning when it comes to our kids and academics? How do we affirm them even when they may not do well?

Focus on the joy of learning

It is easy for our kids to aimlessly drudge through the school years and believe that acing the examinations is the reason why they are studying. Alternatively, we can help them see the value of education and understand that school is a place where we learn the skills to grow and develop throughout life. Let them know learning is important and can be enjoyable by encouraging their efforts, not just their results.

Focus on the everyday achievements

It is easy to find fault since our kids are works in progress, but it is crucial for us to focus on the positive. Don't wait until a special occasion or till your kid gets all A's to encourage the right actions. For instance, if your kid has remembered to do his homework for five days and turned it in (quite a feat for some kids!), you can say, *"You've been really responsible about your schoolwork this week"* or *"I'm happy about the effort you've put into your homework."* Notice what he's doing well or trying hard at and praise that.

Focus on encouraging when the rubber meets the road

Some days, it can be tough for our kids to pick themselves up when they have failed, especially if the failure is repeated. This is where you can be your kid's best encourager. Make the effort to first empathise and understand their feelings by saying things like, *"I'm sorry. You must be feeling so disappointed that you failed your Chinese test again."* Then, encourage them to try again and coach them along. You can say, *"Don't give up, give it another go. Let's try and think of ways to help you improve for the next time."* You can't do the work of developing perseverance for your kid, but you can be his greatest cheerleader, especially when the going gets tough.

When kids grow up in a home with loving parents and an atmosphere of encouragement, it keeps their love tank filled and equips them for lifelong learning and success towards the finishing line.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL A SPECIAL OCCASION OR TILL YOUR CHILD GETS ALL A'S IN HIS FINAL EXAMINATIONS TO ENCOURAGE THE RIGHT ACTIONS.



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A DIFFERENT WAY TO DRIVE DISCIPLINE

What we say matters in keeping our children on track

While applying discipline may be inevitable in our parenting journey, we can choose to always discipline in love. If we discipline in anger, our children will feel the heat but lose the lesson. A parent's displeasure in itself is a strong motivation to action — your children will change their behaviour to avoid it and regain your approval again. What's important is that this displeasure can be expressed very clearly without shouting and without anger.

Feel-Think-Act

The next time you face a situation where your child throws a tantrum, challenges you with rude behaviour or whines for the latest gadget or toy, keep calm! Keeping your cool may be the hardest thing to do at that moment, but it can make a big difference. As your emotions are running high and you're about to react, put "think" between your "feel" and "act." Ask yourself these questions:

- Is the punishment age-appropriate?
- Am I punishing out of my own frustration?
- Am I using the appropriate words?

Words make all the difference

The effectiveness of discipline is dependent on the words we use. If we criticise our children, blame them for their misbehaviour, or use sarcasm, we pull them down instead of build them up. For example, when your child drops a bowl of cereal on the floor, a typical response might be, "*Why can't you be more careful?*" Instead, you can say, "*Accidents happen. I'm sure you'll be able to help clean it up.*" This way, your child's dignity will be left intact.

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A DIFFERENT WAY TO DRIVE DISCIPLINE

When you are angry because of your child's actions, use a calm but firm voice to send him to his room while you both cool off. Say, *"I'm really angry with you and I need some time to calm down right now."* It is okay for him to know that he has crossed the line — the key is to remove yourself from the heat before you say something you may regret later on. When you have cooled down, state the consequences of his action but don't carry on the anger or isolation.

The importance of reconciliation

The process of discipline is only completed if there is reconciliation. Rebuilding the relationship and re-establishing the trust with your child could begin simply by showing empathy. For example, saying *"I know how much you enjoy going to the mall, but we're staying indoors this weekend,"* would show your child that you acknowledge his feelings while remaining firm on the consequences of his actions. In the event that you did say some unnecessarily harsh words in anger, it is okay to apologise. Saying sorry for your mistakes does not reduce you in the eyes of your children; in fact, children will learn to apologise themselves, when they see you modelling it.

ULTIMATELY, OUR GOAL IS NOT TO MAKE OUR CHILDREN FEEL BAD, ASHAMED OR EMBARRASSED, BUT TO HELP THEM MAKE A BETTER CHOICE NEXT TIME.



TOO MUCH PRAISE CAN HURT YOUR CHILD

Affirming your child without overdoing it

It is a good thing to affirm children for the praiseworthy things they do. However, there is a thin line between flattery and praise, and as parents we should be able to distinguish the two.

Flattery is general; praise is specific.

Flattery occurs when you heap compliments on your child for something general that he did not achieve. Praise, on the other hand, reinforces positive, constructive behaviour and is highly specific. It is a genuine response to good things that your child has done. Most importantly, it tells him that he has done something positive and valuable, and makes him want to repeat it. For instance, simply saying "*You've been a good boy,*" is too general and doesn't convey to your child what exactly he has done right. Instead, "*I like the way you cleaned your room today!*" or "*I'm proud of the way you helped your brother with his homework*" would be much more effective.

Flattery is routinely given; praise is timely.

Most parents think the world about their children — and rightly so. We love and are proud of them, and we want them (and everyone else) to know it. However, if we praise them for every little thing they do, even when they have not done anything to deserve it, our words become meaningless. This also sows doubt about our sincerity. Instead, it would be more effective when we are on the lookout for opportunities to offer genuine, well-deserved praise to our children. Praise is important, but it must also be appropriate. Appropriate praise is essential to a child's self-esteem. Praise and encouragement are as important to children as three square meals a day. It builds their confidence and helps them know they are loved and appreciated.

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MOVE YOUR AFFIRMATION INTO ACTION

Practical tips to get started

As a parent, you can give your child healthy and encouraging memories of home and family. It's never too late to intentionally create these precious moments to fill your child's emotional love tank. Here are some fun and creative ways to start your journey:

- 1 Write encouraging phrases on sticky notes and stick them around the house in places where your child will find them. On his bedroom door, on his lunchbox, and even under his pillow can be ideal places for these little perk-me-ups.
- 2 Send your child a text message telling her how much she means to you.
- 3 Set up a family whiteboard or cork board in the living room and fill it with positive words describing your child's attributes.
- 4 Write a letter telling your child how much he means to you. Mention specific ways that he brings joy and laughter into the world. Write about his gifts and talents, and how you believe that he has a bright future.



PRACTISE POSITIVE PARENTING BY DOWNLOADING YOUR FREE CUSTOMISABLE RACE TO PRAISE COUPONS TO AFFIRM YOUR CHILD TODAY, VISIT

www.family.org.sg/RacetoPraise

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MOVE YOUR AFFIRMATION INTO ACTION

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List 20 reasons why you love your child, one reason on each strip of paper. Fold them into stars and place them in a bottle. Get your little one to open them up - one star each day.

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Here are some great phrases to start you off:

a. You can be proud of yourself because...

b. I really appreciate seeing you...

c. I love the way that you...

d. I noticed how you were...

e. I'm impressed! You...

f. It's the way you...



JOIN THE  CHALLENGE

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