

## *Descriptive Praise (DP)*

DP means noticing and then specifically describing what your child is doing right, with a focus on connecting the good behavior to a good character trait. DP makes a powerful positive impact on behavior, confidence, motivation, and self-esteem. **Descriptive Praise greatly helps you to pass on your values to your children.**

DP is in the form of a “paragraph” of perhaps up to 30 seconds. It’s not just the result that you are praising. Remember to include the character/value that you want your child to internalize and identify with. Here are examples of character traits that you want to praise:

- Effort
- Being loving
- Being considerate
- Persistence
- Truthfulness
- Cooperation
- Sharing
- Showing Respect
- Obedience
- Cheerfulness
- Calm
- Patience

Children naturally crave our attention and want our approval. They will tend to repeat the actions that earned them the DP. They become motivated to do the right thing.

Start noticing whenever your child is not doing the annoying habit (complaining, dawdling, squabbling with siblings, ignoring instructions, etc.). At that time, DP the absence of that annoying habit. Examples:

“It’s so quiet in the back seat! That shows you are learning to be calm and respectful of others.”

“You remembered not to grab. You’re just looking with your eyes. That shows self-control.”

“You didn’t interrupt. You waited until I got off the telephone. You are being patient and considerate.”

Remember to use DP at least 10 times a day. Even if you don't think your child is listening or being affected, stay consistent with using DP. A child might even do the annoying habit more at first, but keep doing the DP when he's not doing it and don't give up.

Be sure to address your child's whiney, impatient, or disrespectful tone of voice, even if the words he is saying are reasonable. "I will hear you and answer when you speak to me respectfully in a pleasant voice." As long as we are willing to answer our children when they are whining or disrespectful, they will keep on whining and being disrespectful.

"You stopped whining. Now I want to listen to you."

"For the past 5 minutes you've been talking to me without any whining. What a respectful voice."

Also use DP to reinforce behaviors that you want your child to improve in.

Some DP sentence starters:

"You've been remembering to ..."

"Three nights in a row now, you ..."

"Today, you didn't once ..."

"I've noticed that you remembered to ..."

"I hear you ..."

"In the past week you ..."

"I remember that you ..."

"In the past you ..., but now you ..."

"You're still ..."

"Yesterday, you ..."

"Even though I could see you didn't want to, you ..."

"Nowadays, you usually ..."

"I see that you ..."

## *Descriptive Praise Examples*

### ***Descriptive Praise helped us deal with our son's impulsivity and defiance***

Our son, Jack, eight years old, was very impulsive at home and at school. He grabbed, hated to share, ate with his fingers, loudly resisted homework and bedtimes. His teacher complained that he talked rather than doing his work and was too rough with his classmates. In the first Family Learning Session with Noel, he kept wandering around the room, interrupting, going into my purse, pulling on his father's clothes to get his attention, repeatedly asking for what he wanted even after we had said no, sitting half off his chair, fiddling with whatever was available, and looking away when people talked to him. This was typical. We were used to feeling embarrassed by his behavior.

Our friends, neighbors, and even his teachers had suggested that Jack might be suffering from attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder because his behavior was so different from other eight-year-olds.

Noel taught us to notice and mention every time he stayed in his seat even for a minute, whenever he waited even a few seconds without interrupting, when he wasn't going into my purse or pulling on us for attention, whenever he sat up straight, didn't grab, or made eye contact, et cetera. She also taught us to Descriptively Praise every tiny little step in the right direction at homework time and bedtime. As a result of this, and also because we made the rules clearer, homework very quickly started going better. It took up less time so Jack had more free time. It was amazing how much less tension there was. Jack fussed less at bedtime, so he got to bed earlier and fell asleep faster because he was less stressed. He was more rested and so he naturally had better impulse control.

In a telephone call with Jack's teacher, I also asked her to Descriptively Praise him when he wasn't talking or calling out, when he kept his hands to himself, when he answered properly, when he wrote a bit more than usual, et cetera. The teacher was concerned that the other children would feel left out so I asked if she'd feel comfortable Descriptively Praising the other children as well. She was open to the idea. A few weeks later she said that Jack's behavior had improved, and so had the other children's.

Jack's behavior improved much quicker than I could have ever believed — he really wanted to please us and his teacher. Before we'd learned about Descriptive Praise we were reminding him and scolding him, which was worse than useless as it made him think he was always doing things wrong. He had given up even trying to control himself.

Sometimes, especially in the first few weeks, Jack would do the opposite of whatever we praised him about. But we remembered to wait and then Descriptively Praised him when he stopped, instead of telling him off or repeating what we wanted him to do.

For a while we had to be so careful to remember the Descriptive Praise. I knew I had to do it consistently as much as possible every day or else he would slide back into his old habits. But soon he started asking for praise and even praising himself. After a while we could praise him ten times a day, rather than ten times an hour:

Jack is now so much calmer and more sensible. He's even more mature. And all of us are happier.

Mother of an 8-year-old

### ***Reducing Potty Language and Interrupting***

I couldn't believe how much easier it was to get my four-year-old twins to do things like come to the car right after child care when I Descriptively Praised them. However, I must say that I doubted Descriptive Praise would work to stop annoying habits. But since pointing out the bad habits didn't improve anything, I thought I might as well try it.

So when the twins were going through an annoying stage of using potty language, I decided to try Descriptively Praising them for not using the potty language. The first time I praised them, they started using the potty language again right away. But I persevered, and after a while they just stopped.

At the same time I also used Descriptive Praise to stop them interrupting each other and raising their voices to make themselves heard, which they used to do all the time. After story time one evening I said, "You're using kind words with your brother, and you took turns to talk to each other the whole day long. No one interrupted each other. Very considerate." Both broke into enormous smiles, and I knew they were proud of their achievement.

Mother of twins, age 4