

Praised Toddlers Have Better Approach to Later Challenges



Toddlers who receive parental praise directed at their efforts more than they receive personal praise have a more positive approach to challenges five years later. That's the finding of a new longitudinal study led by Elizabeth Gunderson, assistant professor of psychology at [Temple](#) [1].

The study, "Parent Praise to 1-3 Year Olds Predicts Children's Motivational Frameworks Five Years Later," published this month in the journal [Child Development](#) [2], also found gender differences in the manner parents offer praise to their children.

"The kind of praise focused on effort is called 'process praise' and sends the message that effort and actions are the sources of success, leading children to believe they can improve their performance through hard work," said Gunderson.

Previous studies have looked at this issue among older students. "This study suggests that improving the quality of parents' praise in the toddler years may help children develop the belief that people can change and that challenging tasks provide opportunities to learn," said Gunderson.

For the study, researchers videotaped more than 50 one to three-year-olds and their parents during everyday interactions at home. The families, representing a range of races, ethnicities and income levels, were taped three times, when children were one, two and three years old.

Using the tapes, researchers identified instances in which parents praised their children and classified that praise accordingly. Praise such as "You're doing a good job" or "You worked on that," which emphasized effort, strategies or actions was classified as "process praise." Praise such as "You're so smart" or "You're a good girl" implying children have fixed, positive qualities was termed "person praise." Other types of praise were referred to as "other praise."

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The researchers followed up with the children five years later, when they were seven to eight years old, and measured the children's preferences for challenging versus easier tasks, their ability to strategize about how to overcome setbacks and their beliefs about the malleability of intelligence and personality traits.

When parents used a greater percentage of process praise while interacting with their children at home, the children reported more positive approaches to challenges five years later, could think of more strategies to overcome setbacks and believed that their traits and abilities could improve with effort. However, the other two types of praise — person praise and other praise — were not related to children's responses, the study found, nor was the total amount of praise.

Additionally, although boys and girls received the same amount of praise overall, boys received significantly more process praise than did girls. And five years later, boys were more likely to have positive attitudes about academic challenges than girls and to believe that intelligence could be improved, the study showed.

"These results are cause for concern because they suggest that parents may be inadvertently creating the mindset among girls that traits are fixed, leading to decreased motivation and persistence in the face of challenges and setbacks," said Gunderson.

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Source: [Temple University](#) [1]

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