Five Reasons to Stop Saying “Good Job!” (**)
Dependence on us. The more we say, "I like the way you..." or "Good ______ing," the more kids come to rely on. Lest there be any misunderstanding, the point here is not to call into question the importance of supporting and encouraging children, the need to love them and hug them and the thoughts, feelings, and values that lie behind behaviors. For example, a child may share a snack with a friend as a way of attracting praise, or as a way of making sure

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Mary Budd Rowe, a researcher at the University of Florida, discovered that students who were praised lavishly by their teachers were more tentative in their responses, more

Defining praise: The worst thing is that the child is going to be even less likely to persist with difficult tasks or share their ideas with other students. In short, "Good job!" doesn't reassure children; ultimately, it makes them feel less secure. It may even create a vicious circle such that the more we sate on praise, the more kids seem to need it, so we praise them some more. Sadly, some of these kids will grow into adults who continue to need someone else to put them on the head and tell them they are OK, and we want and we want

Stealing a child's pleasure. Apart from the issue of dependence, a child deserves to take delight in her accomplishments, to feel pride in what she's learned how to do. She also deserves to decide when to feel that way. Every time we say, "Good job!", though, we're telling a child how to feel. To be sure, there are times when our evaluation of her is crucial and our judgment of her behavior is especially important. That constant stream of value judgments is neither necessary nor useful for children's development. Unfortunately, we may not have realized that "Good job!" is just as much an evaluation as "Bad job!" If I tell someone I'm not a positive judgment isn't that it's positive, but that it's a judgment. And people, including children, need some kind of judgment before they can start making one for themselves. So I cherish the occasions when my daughter said something so well that I had to continue improvement than the point isn't to draw, to read, to think, to create — the point is to get the good, whether it's ice cream, a sticker, or a "Good job!"

In a troubling study conducted by Joan Grusac at the University of Toronto, young children who were frequently praised for displays of generosity tended to be slightly less generous on an actual test of sharing (or "I'm not going to share because of the praise I've received before"). Every child who became a little less interested in sharing or helping. Those actions came to be seen as something valuable in their own right but as something they had to do to get that reaction again from an adult. Generosity becomes a means to an end.

Doe praise motivate kids? Sure. It motivates kids to get praise! "Doe praise motivate kids to stop? And if praise does help us, the expense of committing to whatever they were doing that prompted the praise.

Reducing achievement. If as it weren't bad enough that "Good job!" can undermine independence, pleasure, and interest, it can also interfere with how good a job children actually do. Researchers keep finding that kids who are praised for doing well at a creative task tend to stumble at the next task — and they don't do as well as children who weren't praised to begin with.

Why does this happen? Partly because the praise creates pressure to "keep up the good work" that gets in the way of doing so. Partly because their interest in what they're doing may have declined. Partly because they become less likely to take risks — a difficult one for creativity — once they start thinking about how to keep those positive comments coming.

More generally, "Good job!" is a remnant of an approach to psychology that reduces all of human life to behaviors that can be seen and measured. Unfortunately, this ignores the thoughts, feelings, and values that lie behind behaviors. For example, a child may share a snack with a friend as a way of attracting praise, or as a way of making someone else have enough to eat. Praise for sharing ignores these different motives. Worse, it actually promotes the less desirable motive by making children more likely to Fish for praise in the future.

Once you start to see praise for what it is — and what it does — these constant little evaluative eruptions from adults start to produce the same effect as fingernails being tapped down a blackboard. You begin to root for a child to give his teacher what he wants — the relief of their own trouble by turning around to them and saying (in the same

saccharine tone of voice), "Good praising!"

Still, it's not an easy habit to break. It can seem strange, at least at first, to stop praising; it can feel as though you're being chilly or withholding something. But that, it soon becomes clear, suggests that we praise more because we need to say it as much as children need to hear it. Whenever that's true, it's time to rethink what we're doing.

What kids need is unconditional support, love with no strings attached. That's not just different from praise — it's the opposite of praise. "Good job!" is conditional. It implies that the child is "being good" because the child is doing something that we acknowledge is good. In a sense, the praise is reinforcing the behavior.

This point, you'll notice, is very different from a criticism that some people make, that we give kids too much approval, or give it too easily. They recommend that we become more6519 more8720 with our praise and demand that kids "earn" it. But the real problem isn't that children expect to be praised for everything they do these days. It's that we're tempted to take shortcuts, to manipulate kids with rewards instead of explaining and helping them to develop needed skills and good values.

So what's the alternative? That depends on the situation, but whatever we decide to say instead has to be offered in the context of genuine affection and love for who kids are rather than for what they've done. When unconditional support is present, "Good job!" isn't necessary; when it's absent, "Good job!" won't help. If we're praising positive actions as a way of discouraging mischief, this is unlikely to be effective for long. Even when it works, we can't really say the child is now "behaving himself!" it would be more accurate to say the praise is behaving him. The alternative is to work with the child, to figure out the reasons he's acting that way. We may have to reconsider our own requests or just thinking about a way to do it. (Instead of using "Good job!") to get a four-year-old to sit quietly

through a long class meeting or family dinner, perhaps we should ask whether it's reasonable to expect a child to do so...) We also need to bring kids in on the process of making decisions. If a child is doing something that disturbs others, then sitting down with her later and asking, "What do you think we can do to solve this problem? It also helps effective teachers to sort out how to solve problems and teaches that her ideas and feelings are important. Of course, this process takes time and talent, care and courage. Tossing off a "Good job!" when the child acts in the way we do seem appropriate takes none of those things, which helps to explain why "doing to" strategies are a lot more popular than "working with" strategies.

And what can we say when kids just do something impressive? Consider three possible responses:

"That was very nice of you..."