Say Goodbye to Good Job!

21 Ways to Support Your Child and Acknowledge Effort

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Welcome!

It is tempting to offer a child praise or a reward for a new accomplishment or a job well done, but modern research tells us that children will learn more if they value the work itself. Praise-focused phrases, like "good job", are distractions from the intrinsically rewarding nature of developing new skills and independence.

As a mom, I know how easy it can be to rely on simple reward-based habits, especially if they are widely used in your culture or by your own parents during your childhood. It is unrealistic (and in the long-run, unhelpful) to eliminate all forms of praise from your speech, but primarily, communication about accomplishments should put the focus on the child's feelings and efforts, not on the adult's evaluation.

I hope that this packet will be a source of inspiration; replacing praise-focused phrases with more descriptive ones takes repetition before they become new habits. There are two versions here for you to use: a longer version and a shorter version. Feel free to print them out and make copies for your refrigerator or relatives and share with friends.

Love,
Aubrey
Say Goodbye to "Good Job!"

WITH THESE 21 GAME CHANGING RESPONSES

"HMM!" SMILE AND NOD.
Example: Child brings you a puzzle that has been completed. "Hmm!" Now look the child in the eyes, tune in, and listen. What does the child say about his puzzle?

"TELL ME ABOUT THIS!"
Example: Child has glued a yellow circle onto an orange piece of paper and comes to show you the big gluey mess of artwork. "Tell me about this!" What the child says may surprise you.

"I CAN SEE THAT YOU..."
Example: Child has scribbled with chalk on the chalkboard with pink and blue chalk and brings you over to see. "I can see that you have been using pink and blue chalk."

"YOU LOOK PROUD. ARE YOU? I'M GLAD YOU..."
Example: Child chops strawberries into a bowl to serve herself and then invites you to look. "You look proud. Are you? I'm glad you know how to chop your own strawberries now. It's nice to serve yourself when you're hungry."

DESCRIBE + "HOW DID YOU DO IT?"
Example: Child presents you with a handwritten, hand-drawn, haphazardly stapled book that you recognize is very similar to one of his favorite bedtime picture storybooks. "You made your own book. How did you do it?"

"THANK YOU! I APPRECIATE..."
Example: Child gives you a love note in pictorial form - drawn for YOU. "Thank you. I appreciate you thinking of me." Never underestimate a simple thank you!
DESCRIPT + "I APPRECIATE YOUR HARD WORK / EFFORT."
Example: Child loads dishwasher perfectly and looks to you for approval. "You loaded the dishwasher perfectly. I appreciate your hard work!"

"YOUR FACE LOOKS HAPPY! IT FEELS SO GOOD TO..."
Example: Child asks you to watch him perform a physical trick on the playground. "Your face looks happy! It feels so good to stretch your muscles, doesn’t it?"

"I AM SO HAPPY FOR YOU BECAUSE..."
Example: Child masters the monkey bars and she runs to you to celebrate. "I am so happy for you because I know you’ve been working on those monkey bars for a long time!"

"WHEN YOU ________, I..."
Example: Child builds a very tall tower with blocks and asks you to look look look! "When you started that tower, I didn’t have any idea how tall it was going to get! Super tall!"

"WHAT WAS THE HARDEST / EASIEST PART?"
Example: Child learns to ride a bike up and down the block. "What was the hardest part about learning to ride? What was the easiest part?"

"WHEN I WAS A CHILD, SOMETIMES I LIKED TO_____. DO YOU LIKE TO______ TOO?"
Example: Child hands you a list she made of -at words. You read cat, hat, sat, mat... "When I was a child, sometimes I liked to sing a rhyming song. The caaaaat saaaaat on the maaaat la-la-la... Do you also like to sing your rhyming words?"

"WOW! MAY I...?"
Example: Child constructs a crazy invention out of straws, paper towel rolls, masking tape, and paper clips. "Wow! May I try your invention? How do I use it? Would you show me?"

"HMM... I WONDER WHAT YOU’LL COME UP WITH NEXT."
Example: Child makes dominoes topple over in an interesting pattern. "Hmm... I wonder what you’ll come up with next."
"YOU DID IT!"
Example: Child has been trying very hard to write his name and finally has written all of the letters correctly on the page.
"You did it!"

"I'VE NOTICED THAT..."
Example: Child builds an airplane out of legos and comes to show you. "I've noticed that you've been working on your lego building skills and you are starting to make a lot of interesting things."

"I LOVE SEEING YOU________. WOULD YOU LIKE TO..."
Example: Child sits and reads a book. When he gets to the end, he closes it and tells you he can read it. "I love seeing you teaching yourself how to read. Would you like to read this book to me? Or would you like for me to read it to you?"

"WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THIS?"
Example: Child works hard to match all the pictures of animals that live in Africa to the continent of Africa. "What do you think you might have learned from this?"

"HOW DID YOU COME UP WITH THE IDEA FOR THIS?"
Example: Child has made a paper airplane and decorated it. "How did you come up with the idea for this?"

"YOU SURE ARE GROWING! I REMEMBER WHEN YOU WEREN'T ABLE TO______, AND NOW YOU CAN..."
Example: Child has brushed her teeth, for the first time, by herself. "You sure are growing! I remember when you weren't able to brush your own teeth. I brushed them for you every day. But now you can brush them all by yourself!"

A HUG OR A PAT ON THE SHOULDER.
As long as you are giving physical affection regularly and not tied to specific behaviors, feel free to connect with the little one without any words at all! A hug can sometimes say it all.

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Instead of GOOD JOB, Try THESE!

- "Hmm!" Smile and nod.
- Tell me about this!
- I can see that you...
- You look proud. Are you? I'm glad you...
- Describe + How did you do it?
- Thank you! I appreciate___.
- Describe + I appreciate your hard work / effort.
- Your face looks happy! It feels so good to___.
- I am so happy for you because___.
- When you ______, I_______.
- What was the hardest / easiest part?
- When I was a child, sometimes I liked to_____. Do you like to____ too?
- Wow! May I_____?
- Hmm... I wonder what you’ll come up with next.
- You did it!
- I've noticed that___.
- I love seeing you____. Would you like to____.
- What did you learn from this?
- How did you come up with the idea for this?
- You sure are growing! I remember when you weren't able to____, and now you can____.
- A hug or a pat on the shoulder.
Meet Aubrey

Aubrey Hargis, M.Ed. is a parent coach and educational consultant best known for her empathetic approach and appreciation for the magic of childhood.

She is the author of two parenting books: *Baby's First Year Milestones* and *Toddler Discipline for Every Age and Stage*.

As a life-long Montessori advocate and certified former classroom guide, her passion has always been to bring Montessori into the mainstream.

As the founder of the Child Development Institute of the Redwoods, she creates online courses and coaches parents in compassionate discipline techniques and Montessori education.

Aubrey lives with her husband and two children under a blanket of San Francisco fog, where the coastal cliffs and nearby redwood trails are always beckoning for another adventure.