



Understanding and Responding to Feelings and Behaviours

UR FaB

Program in Schools

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Hello from the UR FaB Team,

In our last newsletter, we talked about “Together Time” and how this helps to develop a strong relationship with your child. This happens when children feel that their parents are interested in them and in what they are doing and spend time with them. Today we are going to look at descriptive commenting and specific praise, as ways of communication which continues to build and strengthen your relationship with your child.

Descriptive commenting is a way you can show interest in your child's play by simply describing what they are doing and by providing supportive comments. As adults we have a tendency to ask children questions while they are playing: What animal is that? What are you making? This often stops children from playing and prevents them from exploring their ideas. Descriptive commenting is a running commentary of your child's play. For example: “You're putting the bed in the dollhouse. Now baby is going to bed.”

Praise is another way to build your relationship with your child, and share a deeper intimacy. It is also a way to encourage the behaviour we want our children to do more of. Most parents use general praise such as, “well done, good girl, clever boy, marvellous, fantastic, super, brilliant, ace or cool”. This type of praise is called evaluative praise. Most adults will have received this kind of praise themselves as children and it is familiar to us so it is not surprising that we should use it with our own children. Research shows that descriptive praise helps children know what exactly is liked and is more encouraging for children.

Specific or descriptive praise is a different kind of praise. It is about noticing and mentioning exactly what the child has done well or what you liked about what they did. Descriptive praise improves the general atmosphere of the home. It is very effective in getting children to be more co-operative. When we point out what they're doing right it motivates our children to do more of it. Describe the positive behaviours you see, “You remembered to bring home your reading book,” “You looked at Miss March when she was talking to you then –that was polite.” “You got on your bike again even though you fell off just now –you're being brave.” Praise effort and improvement: “You've remembered to underline the title and put the date on the page.” “You kept on trying with these sums even though you didn't find it easy.”

Specific or descriptive praise can feel hard to do. It does take time and practice. Don't give up!

The UR FaB Team