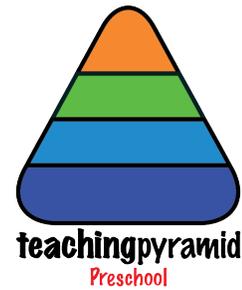




Promoting Social Emotional Competence in California's Young Children



## Moving from Praise to Acknowledgment: Providing Children with Authentic Support

*"The only lifelong, reliable motivations are those that come from within,  
and one of the strongest of those is the joy and pride that grow from knowing  
that you've just done something as well as you can do it."*

*-- Lloyd Dobens and Clare Crawford-Mason*

When a child has done something impressive, instead of saying, "Good job," try one of the following:

### **1. Report what you see (narrating).**

A short, objective statement such as, "You put your dishes in the tub," or "You figured out a solution to the problem," acknowledges children's efforts and allows them to judge for themselves the merits of their achievement. Elaborate on the details of their actions to provide more specific feedback. For example, "It looks like you used blue and green to make an ocean."

### **2. Connect it with a desired character trait, value, or expectation (PDA: Positive, Descriptive Acknowledgment).**

When a child does something that is an example of a character trait, value or expectation, add the expectations language to the comment. For example, if a child has put away toys on the floor say, "You cleaned up the blocks. You are keeping the area safe." Or if they helped a friend you might say, "You gave Yoon Seo the fire truck. That's being friendly." Expectations language provides definitions for the character words, builds self-efficacy (belief that you have the ability to succeed at a task), and helps the child to internalize the behaviors.

### **3. Emphasize the impact on others.**

If a child does something caring or something that benefits the community, acknowledge the positive impact. For example, if a child has put away toys on the floor say, "You cleaned up the blocks. Now someone else can have a turn." Or if they helped a friend you might say, "You gave Yoon Seo the fire truck. He looks really happy to have it." Such language builds a sense of agency (ability to intentionally make things happen through your actions) by drawing the child's attention to the impact his/her actions have on another child.

### **4. Ask open-ended questions.**

Being curious encourages the child to reflect. "What do you like best about your tower?" or "How did you know to put the puzzle piece there?" Asking open-ended questions builds language and engages the children in abstract thinking.

### **5. Say nothing.**

When children are playing, we often feel the need to continually comment on their actions. This can be disruptive and can create an extrinsic motivation to explore. Let children take joy in their own learning and allow them to experience the pride of their own accomplishments.