



Educational Council Consortium

Tips for Educators and Parents

By Tim Conrad, Ph.D. LPC

September 2010

Number 1

Dr. Bob Bowers, CEO
Educational Council

Our Vision:

"To assist school districts and their communities to implement innovative educational solutions and to promote healthy life choices for students."

The Consortium supports the efforts of the member school districts to grow healthy school communities.

Our monthly wellness tips are offered with the hope that they can be added to your educational and parenting toolkits.

Contact us:

Educational Council
1929 Kenny Road
Suite 300
Columbus, OH 43210

P: (614) 292-7744
F: (614) 292-7775
www.edcouncil.org
askus@edcouncil.org

Monthly Tip: Use Praise Wisely

As we progress through the school year, our thoughts often turn to finding ways to support and encourage our students. We want them to stretch and grow and move toward their potential. We also know that each year of school brings additional challenges to navigate and more difficult content to learn. We want our students to meet the increased expectations of the new year.

When we want to encourage and motivate toward success, we have been taught to use one of the most powerful items in our toolkit, praise. We offer praise in the hope that positive reinforcement will encourage students to move toward additional successes. Praise can be helpful, but Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck reminds us in her article, "Caution: Praise Can Be Dangerous," that it is important to use praise wisely.

Exactly how can a confidence builder like praise be dangerous? Dweck points out that when we praise ability or intelligence we are targeting something that students view as fixed, innate and not under their control. They view intelligence as something they have, not something that they can grow.

When we offer "dangerous" praise we may say things like: "You can do this, you are really smart," "This should be easy for someone as smart as you," or "I expect more from you, you are really intelligent"

When the object of our praise is the intelligence or ability of the student, we inadvertently send the message that effort is not part of the success equation. Praising in this way can backfire as students think counter-productive thoughts like:

"I am smart, so I shouldn't have to put much effort into learning."

"If I try and struggle others will realize I am not as smart as they think."

"I cannot succeed; everyone else in this class is smarter than me."

Really want to empower kids? Dweck suggests praising the **effort** students are expending. Effort is within their control. Praising effort sends the message that the trajectory of progress is what matters. Often I have said to my own children that "smart is what you become, not what you are."

When we praise effort, we say things like: "I respect how hard you are working at this" or "I like the way you are approaching this." This signals that effort is part of the success equation. In this way, students see that perseverance and effort can be applied to the current situation to move toward success. We want students to understand that even their most successful peers struggle and have to expend effort to reach their potential.

Brain plasticity studies – the ability of our brain to change when it encounters new demands - support the effort-based view of intelligence. Can all kids grow and learn? Absolutely. It appears that we may never lose the potential to learn new things.

Next time you want to empower students, try noticing and describing the effort they are placing into the process. See how they respond to that kind of encouragement.

[Next Month: Helping Students Bounce Back](#)