



The Parent

Spring 2010

'Cute' is for kittens:

The gentle art of encouragement

by Roslyn Duffy

Situation

Scene #1

Amalies's eyes focus on the wobbling plate of banana pieces she sliced with a small plastic knife. She offers them to Auntie Louise, who says, "Why honey, aren't you the sweetest thing? You are the most clever child!"

Scene #2

Brianna's tongue pokes out in concentration, a purple crayon gripped in her fist as she etches its colour onto a green page of construction paper. She holds up the finished piece, pocked with holes where the crayon rubbed through the paper. "Look at all that purple," observes Margo, the preschool aide. "It looks like you worked really hard on that."

Scene #3

Victor has cut several jagged shapes from a piece of wrapping paper. He rubs a glue stick over a small box and begins to attach his shape to it. His mother smiles and asks if he is finished. When he nods, they both admire his handiwork. "Tell me what you have made," his mom asks. "A rocket ship," says Victor, joyfully waving the box in a simulated launch.



Solution

Three Themes

These adults obviously care about these children, but one of them responded with praise while the other two offered encouragement. Can you tell the difference? In our book, *Positive Discipline for Preschoolers*, Jane Nelson, Cheryl Erwin, and I distinguish between praise and encouragement with the following definitions:

Praise:

To glorify, especially attribution of perfection; An expression of approval.

Encouragement:

To inspire with courage; To spur on: stimulate. (2007, p.94)

Another way to spot this difference is to look for specifics. Praise is often interchangeable. The first example is the 'praise' response. We could switch Amalie's name to that of Archie; the banana slices could be pickles or a painting; and Auntie 'Anybody' could have said the exact same thing, or something similarly generic: "Nice job!" "Beautiful!" "That's terrific!" On the other hand, Brianna's choice of purple and her effort set her work a bit apart. We could not have made that same comment to Amalie or to Victor.

In the third example, although Auntie Louise and the preschool aide might have asked Brianna or Amalie the same question Victor's mom asked him—"Tell me about..."—each child's answer would have been different, with a unique story to tell. These distinctions may be subtle, but the results are not.

Continued...

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"Your community's best source of child care information and resources"

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Unique is key

Humans like recognition. Comments like Auntie Louise's are not harmful, but they aren't very satisfying, either. The personalized and unique aspect of Margo's comments and those of Victor's mom have impact because they contain the key ingredient of being unique. Margo's comment is unique in what is noticed, and the comments of Victor's mom are unique in what is drawn forth. Both satisfy on a deeper level. Unique is one key difference between praise and encouragement.

Praise has a sweet taste to it, but like sugar, its effects are fleeting. Eat a candy bar and an hour later, hunger is back and that initial energy surge has sputtered out.

Encouragement, meanwhile, is a plate full of ripe peaches, crunchy apples, and crumbly rich cheese, all luscious, mouth-watering, and soul-satisfying. Encouragement provides nourishment for the lifetime ahead.

This does not mean that we need to anguish over every comment. A bit of candy now and then is fine. But it is worth learning how to provide the more exquisite fare that comprises encouragement.

Cute or capable?

Children are cute. They really are. And everyday they do things that make us laugh or sometimes bring tears to our eyes with their sweetness. A child offering his sandwich to a classmate who forgot her lunch is an awesome act of generosity. It melts our hearts to observe such spontaneous kindness. And because it is so precious, doesn't it deserve to be elevated by our response?

Praise teaches children that value lies not in their personal accomplishments, but in whether their actions gain approval or attract attention. This doesn't leave much room for feelings of personal satisfaction. When we treat a child's actions as 'cute,' we miss the opportunity to convey that we see him as capable. 'Cute' is conditional. Who is the cutest? It may be a question rife in the halls of junior high, but not a solid foundation for lifetime self-esteem. While the kitten nipping at your pinky is cute, the full-grown cat biting into your big toe is not.

Encouragement, because it is grounded in uniqueness, is immune from such comparisons. A child who feels capable heads into life with confidence, while the little one who charmed everyone with her antics when tiny will soon feel out of the running when that cooing baby brother arrives with his over-the-top cuteness quotient. (Nelson et al., 2007).

Practice make progress

How do we develop this language of encouragement? The process of changing anything, including what we say, begins with awareness. Notice what you say and decide if it can be improved upon. And remember, changing behaviour takes time and practice. At first, you may notice the difference only after doing something the old, familiar way. "Aren't you cute? What a pretty dress!" That's okay. Noticing demonstrates awareness. Next, you may catch yourself half-way through blurting out a typical phrase of praise. Do not despair. This is progress. Again, you noticed! And this presents the perfect opportunity to practice something new. "Fab-(um...)-ulous." Pause. "And look at all the greens and pinks you used. Which colour do you like best?"

Over time, the new way of doing things will become automatic. And well before that old, pat praise rolls off your tongue, you will notice. Stop. Take a deep breath. Then proceed. "I understand you helped make tonight's salad. Tell me how you did that."

This response demonstrated your interest and the conversation has been invited to continue. (Please notice I didn't write, "Good job!" This response works for adults, too.)

Encouragement: A worthwhile art

Parenting and caregiving offer challenges, many of them beyond our control to prevent or change. But encouragement is an art we can master. Encouragement, and that dose of courage inherent within it, will make life's other challenges bearable and surmountable—for adults and children alike.

Reference

Nelson, J., Erwin, C., & Duffy, R. (2007). *Positive Discipline for Preschoolers*. New York: Three Rivers Press.

***Positive Discipline for Preschoolers provides a chart delineating the differences between 'praise' and 'encouragement', p.94.*

Roslyn Ann Duffy is the author of The Top Ten Preschool Parenting Problems: and What To Do About Them, Exchange Press. She is also co-author (with Jane Nelsen and Cheryl Erwin) of Positive Discipline for Preschoolers; and Positive Discipline: the First Three Years, both in new revised edition, Three Rivers Press, Random House. Roslyn is a 17-year veteran Director of The Learning Tree Montessori Child Care in Seattle, Wa.; lectures and teaches classes for both parents and teachers; and is a counselor in private practice. She has four children and three grandchildren. Visit her web site at www.RoslynDuffy.com.

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Westcoast Family Resources Society offers

Make The Connection

Join in for an exciting new concept in Family Drop-ins

Build your confidence in play with your child in this interactive, hands-on weekly group.

When: Mondays

Time: 1:00–3:00 p.m.

Where: Tri-Cities East Neighbourhood Centre
2062 Manning Ave., Port Coquitlam

For additional information, call 604-944-2500 or email: tri.cities@westcoastfamily.org

Quiz Night

Do you always know the answer on Jeopardy? Are you a whiz at Trivial Pursuit? If so, test your skills at the Friends of Coquitlam Public Library's annual Quiz Night. All proceeds support literacy projects for children and adults, including *Books for Babies* and the library's book bus. Tickets are \$20.00 each.

When: Friday, April 9, 2010

Time: 7:30 p.m.–10:00 p.m.

Location: Coquitlam Public Library
575 Poirier Street, Coquitlam

For more information, please call the library at 604-937-4131, or Anne Scott at 604-464-2413.

Ready, Set, Learn

is returning to a school near you!

Elementary schools in School District #43 invite you and your three-year-old to your neighbourhood school for an early welcome to the school community. Learn about your neighbourhood school, community resources and early childhood development.

For the neighbourhoods of Panorama Heights, Bramblewood, Hampton Park and Pinetree Way:

Thursday, March 4, 2010
Panorama Heights Elementary
1455 Johnson Street
4:00–5:30 p.m.

For the neighbourhoods of Aspenwood and Mountain Meadows:

Thursday, March 18, 2010
Aspenwood Elementary
2001 Panorama Drive
6:00–7:30 p.m.

Further sessions to follow at more locations!

For more information, contact your neighbourhood school. Visit www.sd43.bc.ca



Ready, Set, Learn is sponsored by the ministry of Education, in conjunction with School District 43.

Tri-City Women's Resource Society presents

Healthy Relationships Group

A group for women who want to learn more about themselves and the relationships in their lives. Topics will cover understanding the impacts of abuse, communication skills, conflict resolution skills, self esteem, boundaries, stress management skills, developing relationships with yourself and others and understanding your relationship patterns. This group is for women who have been impacted by abuse.

When: Wednesdays, Beginning April 14 (10 weeks)

Time: 6:00–8:00 p.m.

Location: #200–2540 Shaughnessy St., Port Coquitlam

For more information or to register for any of these free workshops, contact Tri-City Women's Resource Society at 604-941-7111, or infor@tcwrs.com

Parent Participation Preschool Teacher's Association & Council of Parent Participation Preschools in BC presents

**"Exploring the Power of Real Play"
Bev Bos and Michael Leaman**

When: Saturday, May 1

Time: 9:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

Location: Highlands Elementary School Gym
3150 Colwood Dr. North Vancouver

Cost: \$30.00

**For tickets please contact Deanna at hilder-zoo@shaw.ca or CPPPBC at cnclbc@telus.net
For additional information, visit www.cpppreschools.bc.ca**



New Westminster Family Place

93 Sixth Street, New Westminster

This free drop-in program is for families with children 0–5 years, parents and children are welcome to experience art, songs and a healthy snack for the children.

Monday through Saturday, 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Monday & Tuesday, 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

For more information call 604-520-3666

"Play gives children a chance to practice what they are learning."

~Fred Rogers

Family Fun!

Row, Row, Row Your Boat



Saturday, March 20
Fraser River Discovery Centre
New Westminster Quay
1:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m.

Enjoy the Fraser River and a **Teddy Bear Pirate Party!** This is a fun-filled event for families with children 0-6 years of age. There will be fun activities, entertainment and snacks. FREE.

To register please e-mail infor@kidsnewwest.ca or contact Dorothy at 604-660-0310

Partners in the Park & International Migratory Bird Day



Colony Farm Regional Park
Saturday, May 8
1:00 p.m.-4:00 p.m.

Learn about herons and other wildlife, discover what is sprouting in the community gardens or take a guided nature walk in search of the brilliant Lazuli Bunting. FREE

For more information, call 604-520-6442

Barnacle Buddies

Saturday, May 9
Belcarra Regional Park
1:30 p.m.-3:00 p.m.

Join in a seaside adventure! Search for barnacles, tiny shore crabs and colourful sea stars among the rocks and in the sand. Share the beach with your child as you help instill respect for this fragile environment. \$12/child, adult pair.

Registration required, call 604-432-6359

Mother Goose Program for Korean Parents and Children



Coquitlam Public Library
3001 Burlington Drive, Coquitlam
Wednesdays, March 31-May 19
10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

For more information and registration call 604-468-6101

for Mandarin Parents and Children

Circle of Friends, Central Elementary School
2260 Central Avenue, Port Coquitlam
Thursdays, April 1-May 27
10:00 a.m.-11:30 a.m.

For more information and registration call 604-468-6002

Parents with kids' age under 3 and living in the Tri-City area, share in the fun of learning nursery rhymes, songs and stories. FREE.



Spring into Summer

Sunday, May 16
Burnaby Lake Regional Park
10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

Join the season opening of the Burnaby Lake Nature House. Take a guided walk with a park interpreter to learn about our spring avian visitors and to see some of the summer's first plants. FREE

www.metrovancouver.org

Tri-Cities Healthy Kids Fair

Thursday, April 22
Port Coquitlam Recreation Complex
2150 Wilson Avenue, Port Coquitlam
9:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Community organizations will be available to provide parents of tots and preschoolers with information on safety, health, literacy awareness, recreation and other community programs. FREE.

For more information call 604-927-7946 or visit www.tricitysecd.citysoup.ca

Queensborough Day

May 30, 2010
920 Ewen Avenue, New Westminster

This annual community celebration is filled with fun, food and activities for the entire family. There is entertainment, rides and crafts. The highlights of the day are the food venues representing several diverse cultural groups.

For more information, call the Queensborough Community Centre at 604-525-7388