

Chapter 11 Let's get practical

Some parents believe that we should only say positive things to our children so that they can develop a good self-image, but not all positive communication is constructive. Identify the dangers in each of the following examples and then write down a better compliment or form of encouragement in its place.

1. You are my prettiest child! I love you so much!
2. Thank you for picking up my bag. I wouldn't be able to do anything without you!
3. You are the smartest child in the whole world!
4. I know you will show everyone who is the fastest boy on two legs. I am so proud of you!
5. You are always so friendly!
6. Just see how fantastically well your sister did in her ballet exams. One day you will dance just as well.

Answers:

1. Did you notice that the first example could make a child think that one has to be pretty to deserve love? It is preferable that "I love you" not be coupled with a compliment, otherwise our children don't experience unconditional love.
2. The second example is an exaggeration and insincere. Obviously, one can do much without the help of one's child. Rather qualify what it is that you appreciate: "You are so willing to assist" or "It is good manners to help a lady."
3. Prove it! Compliments for characteristics that your child received as gifts from God don't have much worth. Rather compliment your child on hard work. When we acknowledge our children for their talents, the following approach will work better: "Do you realise that you have received an exceptional talent for Math from the Lord? I look forward to seeing how you will use it in future to help other people. Maybe you will solve big problems!" Also point out other people's talents to your child so that she doesn't feel superior.

4. These statements create huge expectations and imply that we will only be proud if our child wins. How about an alternative, such as "I can't wait to see you run. Enjoy it! Put your heart into it!" As with love, our pride should always be unconditional. We should be proud of what they accomplish with their talents on their own steam rather than what they achieve as a result of our relentless performance pressure.
5. "Always" is a dangerous word. This statement creates the expectation that your child has to achieve the impossible, namely never getting angry or impatient. Rather comment on his behaviour: "I see you looked Mr. Reynolds in the eye when you spoke to him, and you asked him about his day. That was very polite of you. People enjoy it when you are interested in them."
6. Comparing children to each other is almost always a mistake. It is very dangerous to use a sibling's achievements as an example. Each child should be allowed his own place in the sun. Growing up in the shadow of an older sister is unfair. Rather say: "Your sister can dance very well! I am curious to see what things you will like doing when you get to be her age. You already enjoy dancing, but you also enjoy other things like swimming and art." In this way we emphasise pleasure rather than achievement, because achievement without pleasure usually reveals that it is the parent's dream and not the child's.

Proverbs 15:4

Kind words heal and help; cutting words wound and maim (The Message).

Also read Proverbs 15:1, 25:15 and James 3:1-12.

These scriptures encourage us to pay attention to how we talk and what we talk about, for the sake of those we are speaking to and for the sake of our own souls and our testimony as Christians. Which aspects are you finding difficult?

- keeping my language pure
- keeping quiet when I don't have something good to say
- letting go of an argument even if I know I'm right
- keeping secrets
- keeping quiet so that I can listen better.

What implications does this have for the rearing of your children?