

USING PRAISE AND COMPLIMENTS WITH YOUR TEENAGER – CAREGIVER

During times of stress or conflict, it is common for caregivers to get caught up in focusing on the *negative* aspects of a teenager's behavior. There is a real risk in this. If you get caught up in focusing on the negative, you may neglect to reward, praise or compliment your teenager's positive accomplishments or behavior. If this happens, your teenager may begin to feel that they can never please you, your relationship and closeness will suffer, and you will begin to lose influence over your teenager's behavior. Here are some signs to watch out for:

Signs that your parenting may be focusing too much on the negative:

1. You find yourself seldom saying positive things about your teenager.
2. You feel irritated at your teenager much of the time.
3. You find yourself constantly delivering punishment or negative consequences.
4. You find your real or threatened punishments getting drastic – for example, you begin to talk about kicking them out of the house or disowning them.
5. You find yourself thinking that your teenager can't or won't do anything right.
6. You find yourself accepting only perfection (for example if your child brings home 5 good grades and one poor one, you only point out the poor one).
7. You find yourself thinking negative things about your teenager most of the time.
8. Your relationship with your teenager has very few moments where it feels close and supportive.

It is important to remember that every teenager, even at their worst, is doing some things right.

Your effectiveness as a caregiver will be improved if you recognize this. Sometimes caregivers are concerned about giving too much recognition or too much praise. Sometimes caregivers may think that their teenager should know the right thing to do and just do it, whether they get recognition or not. This is usually a mistake. One of the ways teenagers learn to value doing the right things is because important adults in their life recognize their efforts and reward their accomplishments. For example, imagine how it would be on a job if you did something very well, or worked hard to accomplish something, and your boss never seemed to notice or care. You might begin to think there was no point in working hard anymore. That is frequently how it goes with teenagers.

There are two ways you can offer praise and recognition to your teenager. One way is called "unlabeled praise." Unlabeled praise is a general compliment that doesn't really point out what they did to earn it. For example, you might say, "You're a really good kid." This kind of positive comment is fine and good, but it is not as effective as a "labeled praise." A labeled praise points out exactly what your teenager did that you appreciate. For example, if your teenager brings home a good or improved grade, you can say something like, "I know you've been working on that subject—good job." Or you might say, "Those extra hours of homework you put in really paid off." Or you might say, "Your grandmother and I are both proud of what you've accomplished with your grades..."

You should use your own words; just make sure to mention what they did that you are complimenting or recognizing.

You should AVOID mixing compliments with criticism or sarcasm. For example, DON'T say, "Well, I'm glad you did your chores without being asked—it's the first time you've ever done that!" The negative kills the positive. Keep your positive statements positive.