



**CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION**  
A SAMHSA Supported Drug-Free Community Coalition  
Led By Centre County Drug and Alcohol



**ARTICLE 30 – October 8, 2008 – Praise Important for Teen Self Esteem**

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Praise: we all thrive on it, but it can make us feel uncomfortable. Does the person lavishing praise upon us want something? What if this wasn't our best work, wouldn't we feel undeserving? What if it makes us feel anxious about maintaining that person's high regard? Taking into account our own reactions to praise can help guide us toward praising others more effectively.

Sometimes parents want to praise their teens more often, but they find that it can be more difficult than praising younger children. Due to teens' active lifestyles, they often aren't at home too much. When they are, typical tensions between parents and teens can result in more criticism than praise. Those work at offering it to their teens are sometimes surprised that some don't believe the praise and think that their parents are only saying something nice because they are their parents.

To avoid praise that backfires or isn't well received, there are some pointers for offering effective praise.

- Avoid "backhanded praise," which is a positive comment immediately followed by a negative comment such as, "Why can't you do that all of the time?" or, "I knew you could just do that if you tried;" or, "Next time, try to do it better." This technique was once believed to be a good management tool whose purpose was to soften the blow before a necessary criticism. It can create disbelief of any praise delivered by one who uses it.
- Focus on specific behaviors and describe what you feel about them instead of making global comments about the teen or their actions. For example, rather than just saying, "Nice job," instead say something like, "Wow! I appreciate it that you emptied the dishwasher *and* put in the dirty dishes," or, "There are no streaks on the car's windshield after you cleaned it; how did you do that?"
- The "I-Message" format is a good way to practice specific praise. A parent can "fill in the blanks" with appropriate words for the situation: "I feel \_\_\_\_\_ (name the feeling) when you \_\_\_\_\_ (describe behavior or action) because \_\_\_\_\_ (state the reason). This may be followed by thanks.
- Another way to make teens feel special is to start a statement with, "I noticed that \_\_\_\_\_" and then mention something positive that you saw. Some examples: "I noticed that in your writing, you were able to summarize all of the points really clearly;" or, "I noticed that you let your sister go first today."
- Rather than too often saying "I'm so proud of you," focus your praise on how he or she has improved on something practiced and how good it must feel to have worked for it. This takes the emphasis off needing approval from others to finding inner pleasure from doing good work.

Above all, these actions speak volumes and should be part of our interactions: a sincere tone; a loving gaze; or even a hug (when we can get away with it!)

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