

If children are misbehaving or disruptive,
then they're

NOT LEARNING

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We don't like starting with a deficit statement, because this issue of Swings and Roundabouts is about potential. But the reality is that if we talk about misbehaving and disruptive children we're more likely to get your attention – and so are they. Research has shown that teachers give three to fifteen times as much attention to children's misbehaviour than to positive behaviour. It's not hard to understand why – children who need love (or positive attention, praise and encouragement) ask for it in the most unloving ways!

So let's talk about potential. One of the most important factors that contributes to children becoming motivated and successful learners and also to the quality of the relationship between a teacher and a child, is the quality of a teacher's attention. In observing what a teacher attends to, children are learning what behaviours are valued by their teacher.

Three teachers from Pukekohe Central Kindergarten in Auckland have been attending more to their child-teacher relationships since doing the Incredible Years Teacher programme last year. Incredible Years provides early childhood and primary teachers with approaches to help turn disruptive behaviour around and create a more positive learning environment for children. One of the foundations for positive learning environments is how we influence the relationship with the child through praise and encouragement.

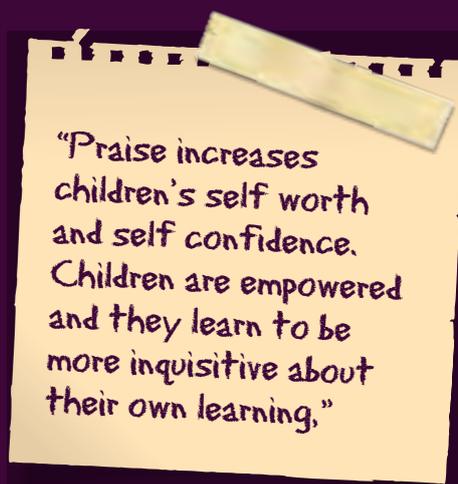
Praise and encouragement – the experience of Pukekohe Central Kindergarten

"When you have given praise and encouragement to a child, it is so great to see a big smile grow across their face and you can see their confidence growing right in front of you," says Teacher Kaylee Mills from Pukekohe Central Kindergarten. "Some children thrive on the praise and encouragement straight away and are always eager for more and to show you how good they can do things. Other children that are more reserved take more time – these are the children that whenever you see positive behaviour, you really target this behaviour and praise them straight away and as time goes on you do see the child respond to this praise more and more."

The kindergarten gives certificates to children for continual good behaviour.

They also use stamps and verbal praise. "Whenever I spot a child doing a great job, or helping their peers out, I give the child a stamp on her/his hand to show recognition of a job well done," says Teacher Hsiu-Ying Su. "The rewards can be for tidying up, listening at mat time, following the safety rules at kindergarten, etc. For other children who see the reward and recognition that their friends are receiving, there's the incentive and inspiration to do a good job too."

"Praise increases children's self worth and self confidence. Children are empowered and they learn to be more inquisitive about their own learning," says Head Teacher, Sarmila Das. "Proximal praise and encouragement also reduces negative/disruptive behaviour."



"We are very fortunate that all of our five teaching team members participated in the Incredible Years programme together. We applied many of the strategies in our kindergarten routine in unison. This made the rules, routines and limits more consistent and predictable for the children. We formulated rules with our children and periodically go over the rules with them. We formulated our Positive Guidance Policy and Procedure during our Incredible Years programme and sought parents' feedback. We got wonderful ERO feedback about the way we promote social competence."

It is vital that early childhood education teachers promote social competence and address disruptive behaviour because you can't separate learning from behaviour. "I believe Te Whariki's strands and principles go hand in hand with the Incredible Years programme," says Sarmila. "Te Whariki promotes holistic learning for the

children. Te Whariki emphasises the huge importance on reciprocal relationship-building to enhance children's learning. Empowering children and valuing them as individuals are the common threads in Incredible Years and Te Whariki."

If left unchecked, disruptive behaviour often leads to early failure at school, truancy, crime and other social problems. But if we get in early we have a greater chance of addressing challenging behaviour. If we intervene with programmes when children are aged three to five years old there is a 75-80 per cent chance that their behaviour will change. This drops to 65-70 per cent for children aged five to seven and 45-50 per cent for children aged eight to 12 years.

So let's finish with a statement that's full of potential – if children know what's expected of them, feel connected and praised, they're more likely to behave positively, learn better and achieve in the future.

About the Incredible Years Teacher programme

If you're interested in doing the Incredible Years programme contact your district Ministry of Education, Special Education office.

The Incredible Years Teacher programme provides teachers with approaches to help turn disruptive behaviour around and create a more positive learning environment for children.

Incredible Years is available to early childhood and primary teachers across the country.

Incredible Years is part of the Government's Positive Behaviour for Learning Action Plan which provides a range of programmes and initiatives for parents, teachers and schools to turn around problem behaviour in children.

The teacher programme covers:

- building positive relationships with students
- proactively preventing behaviour problems
- using attention, encouragement and praise to increase positive behaviours
- motivating students with incentives
- helping students learn social skills, empathy and problem-solving
- using appropriate consequences for undesirable behaviour.

The Government funds release time for teachers doing Incredible Years and there is a small fee for the resources used on the programme.

Teachers will need to be able to commit to six one-day sessions over six months (this allows you to apply strategies and evaluate them) and a follow-up one-day session three months later. It is better to have more than one teacher from a centre doing the programme so that it can be imbedded across your centre.

Making praise and encouragement effective

The child with behaviour problems is most likely to have a negative self-evaluation and low self-worth. They may not trust adults. They are also more likely to miss praise, particularly if it's delivered in a neutral tone, or is vague or infrequent. You need to supply them with extra amounts of positive and consistent praise and encouragement – they need it more often than most. You might also need to provide them with motivators such as stamps or stickers. (Don't worry,

this won't make the other children feel bad. In the long run, giving more praise and positive attention to the disruptive child can be beneficial for all the children in your centre because you're reminding everyone of the behaviours that are expected.)

- Pinpoint what it is about the behaviour and be specific in your praise – "You've done a good job of ..." rather than "Good job."
- Say it like you mean it – praise with sincerity and enthusiasm and in a variety of ways. Make a big deal of it. Smile, show warmth, give the child a pat on the back.
- Don't wait for behaviour to be perfect before praising.
- Praise individual children as well as all the children or small groups.
- Use praise consistently and frequently, especially when a child is first learning a new skill or behaviour.
- When you have given a direction, look for at least two children who are following the direction – say their name and praise their compliance stating clearly what they are doing.
- Focus on a child's efforts and learning, not just the end result.
- For particularly challenging children, have a plan for them and use praise and encouragement strategically to support your goals for that child.
- Promote child self-praise, eg "You must feel proud of yourself for..."
- Keep your praise pure – avoid combining praise with put-downs ("You picked up the toys like I asked but next time how about doing it before I have to ask.")
- Balance your praise of academic and social behaviours and remember to praise aspects of a child's personality such as thoughtfulness or patience as well as persistence with tasks.
- Use proximity praise – instead of focusing on the child who is disengaged, praise those who are attending to the task and completing their work.
- Use praise that is not contingent on behaviours ("It is fun working with you.")
- Have positive expectations for all children at your centre – they're a powerful motivator. Every child has potential and if you believe it, they believe it too.

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