

INSIGHTS

Give kids a thumbs up for the right things



Children of all ages enjoy parental recognition. They like when their parents make a fuss over their behaviour or highlight something they've done well.

Sometimes parents will reward their children's behaviour with a treat, money or a gift. This is okay in small doses, but parental recognition alone is a high enough driver of children's behaviour most of the time.

First borns, in particular, love approval. Youngest children just love that you have noticed them! Second borns can sometimes do things in spite of their parents, but deep down they love the recognition too, even if they don't let on that they do.

The behaviour you focus on expands

If you want your kids to be neater then focus on their neat behaviours. "You've tidied your toys up before dinner. Top job!" You don't have to throw a party, just let them know that you noticed and you approve of their tidiness. You may also let them know how it affects you. "You've tidied your toys up before dinner. It makes my job easier." The behaviours that you notice and comment on will expand.

Noticing kids' tidiness once won't suddenly turn messy kids into exceptionally neat ones, but do it often enough and you'll start to get some turn around.

You can give kids a thumbs up for all sorts of behaviours. Here's some examples.

Being co-operative

Stubborn kids need a pat on the head when they respond on your terms not theirs.

Being brave

Nervous and anxious kids need to have their bravery pointed out to them. It's reassuring and empowering.

Being helpful

Want helpful kids? Then you need to notice helpful behaviours.

Being tolerant

Sometimes older siblings need to be very tolerant of younger siblings. Tolerance is a very giving behaviour and should be promoted.

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Being patient

Something to encourage in boys, in particular. It's often not their strong point.

Being persistent

Let kids know when 'hanging in there' pays off. The link between persistence and success is massive but persistence needs to be promoted. It's also the one factor of temperament that can be affected by parenting.

Being friendly

If your child struggles in social situations then recognise pro-social behaviours such as sharing, initiating contact with another child or taking an interest in another person.

Don't wait until you get perfect behaviour to give recognition, particularly for very young children. Kids have L-plates when it comes to behaving (co-operatively, bravely, patiently) so their attempts and close approximations need to be verified by the significant adults in their lives – their parents.

Recognising kids' positive behaviours is easy to do, but it's also easy not to do. We often get tied up with other things and forget to show appreciation and nurture the behaviours our kids need to develop. It's important to be aware of this. It's the little things such as giving positive recognition that have the biggest impact on kids' development.



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Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's an award-winning speaker and the author of 12 books for parents including *Spoonfed Generation*, and the bestselling *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It*. Michael is a former teacher with 15 years experience, and has 30 years experience in parenting education. He also holds a Master of Educational Studies from Monash University specialising in parenting education.