

# Ep #76 Giving Effective Praise

This is episode 76. Let's begin.

Smarter Parenting welcomes you to our podcast series, The Parenting Coach for ADHD. Here to heal and elevate lives is your Parenting Coach, Siopé Kinikini.

Hello, my friends. How is everyone? I hope everybody's doing well today. I am super excited to talk about one of the skills that I consistently use throughout the day with everyone that I meet, and that is a skill of Effective Praise. Now, during this podcast, my goal is to help you understand the skill, understand why it's important to use, and also to give you [the tools necessary for you to begin using it immediately with your children.](#)

This is a skill you do not want to wait to use. You want to use this as soon as you can because it's one of those skills that helps parents build relationships and it breaks down walls. It helps increase communication and it begins to build trust between children and parents. So I am super excited to talk about [Effective Praise](#) and I actually have a story to share about how Effective Praise transformed the life of one young man who was really struggling and his mother.

Again, during this podcast, we're going to be covering quite a bit of information on [Effective Praise](#). But before we begin, I just need us to take a breath and relax and really take some time to prepare to absorb all the information that I have prepared because it is quite a lot of information. And yet I feel like this is easy enough that you're going to be able to do this quickly. Like really quickly and do this in your home with your children.

Now I want to talk about three things first and I will go over these topics more in-depth, but the three things that I want to cover are the power of Effective Praise to change everything in your life. [Effective Praise has the power to change everything in your life because it is a mind switch.](#) It helps to switch your mind and your child's mind into an area of more positivity.

Now, the second thing is I want to talk about the difference between praise and Effective Praise. There is a difference between what you think you're doing is praise and what is actually Effective Praise as done through the Teaching-Family Model, which is what we use.

Number three. The third thing I want to talk about is how you can do it and how important it is for you to do it, to move from being a critical focused parent into a lovingly focused parent. So that's a switch from being critically focused to being lovingly focused with your children. Right?

## [The ADHD Smarte Parenting Podcast](#)

So we're going to get in-depth in all of these things, but first, let's talk about the power of Effective Praise to change everything in your life. I'm going to share with you an experience that I had while I was working as an in-home worker.

Now those who are new to this podcast, let me just explain what an in-home worker does. For those of you who have been listening for a long time, you probably know, but this is a good reminder of the kind of work that I did.

So as an in-home worker, I worked with families that were usually on the brink of being separated by the court systems because of issues that were happening within the home. We were kind of the last resort intervention before the courts would say, "Okay, the children need to be removed from this home because it's unsafe for them." So my role was to go into the home and I would actually become part of the family. I would spend eight to 10 hours a week in the home with the family during their daily routine and everything that they were working through and teach them parenting skills and also skills to the children to help things improve in the home well enough that the children did not have to be removed from the home.

So that was my job and we would spend roughly around six, sometimes 10 weeks, depending on the intensity of the family. Now if you think about how much time that is, that is a lot of time spending with people in your home to watch what's happening, to see how you're interacting with each other. And so that was my job. I would visit these families. I only worked with three families at a time because that's a lot of time with people. And during my time I would go in and assess what's happening and then we come up with a plan. And Effective Praise was a skill that I would consistently use with almost every family because it helped build rapport and it helped us communicate better during the entire intervention. So back to what I was talking about, the power of Effective Praise to change everything in your life.

There was a family that I was working with and it was a young man. His name is Evan, 16 years old. He was a rough kid. Tough kid. He had been in the court system for years so he got into probation roughly around 10, 11-years-old. He was already involved in court issues for vandalism, for violence, skipping school, disrespect to authority. [He was diagnosed with ODD](#). So this kid really was a hard kid. By the time I started working with him, he already had a couple of years of behaving intensely out of control. And so I was called in to work with him. Now of course me showing up into the home was different because usually he would go somewhere and receive treatment, but my work as an in-home worker actually went into the homes of these families. And in working with Evan, Evan was really resistant to me initially. Very resistant to talking. To communicating. To doing anything. And yet, he knew he had to participate and cooperate because he didn't want to be removed from the home.

Now Evan lived with his mother. Her name was Brenda. And Brenda was a single mother and she worked and when she finished work, she would return home. Evan was supposed to be at home and they would interact with each other, but it was high intensity all the time. Arguing, fighting, yelling, blaming, screaming between the two of them. And Brenda in our discussion

## [The ADHD Smarte Parenting Podcast](#)

when we initially started, I noticed was a critical parent. Now, this is a typical thing that I noticed with parents who struggle with communication with their children is this focus on criticism. So they're very critical about the behaviors of their children and the things that they need to do. So when I worked with them, I began with [Effective Praise](#). And because I was doing Effective Praise, Brenda started to notice a change in my relationship with her son. And I taught her the skill and she was able to see this transformation happen in her son and his ability to communicate and be more open to her and to me throughout this course of roughly around 10 weeks that we were all working together.

So in teaching her this skill of Effective Praise, she really struggled because she was so focused on the negative behaviors that he had in the home, that it was very difficult for her to praise him for anything. She really didn't feel like he deserved any praise for anything because he was so disruptive and he was so disrespectful to her. And so we started to work on praise and so she started to give little praise. Now, this is where I'm going to talk about the difference between praise and Effective Praise. So Brenda would start to say things like, "Good job Evan." Or "Okay, you did good," and she would leave it at that. Now the Effective Praise actually is a lot more intense and I had to teach her how to Effectively Praise her son.

Let me give you the steps to effective praise and you'll see the difference. So when you're praising a child, most parents just praise and say, "Good job buddy. You did great." Or, "Thumbs up." Or, "You deserve a star." Or "Great job." Those tend to be the praise statements that you hear from most parents and they feel like they're doing praise when in fact they are doing praise, but it's not effective. That's not Effective Praise. Effective Praise has four steps. Okay, so four steps. The first one is to show approval and find a positive in their behavior, whatever it may be in the situation. The second step is to describe the positive behavior. You need to be descriptive. Third step is to give a meaningful reason. So you're giving a reason why the positive behavior is important and this meaningful reason needs to be important to the child.

[And then the fourth step is to give a reward, which is optional.](#) Give a reward or you can give praise again and say, "Great job" and wrap it up. So in those four steps, I was teaching it to Brenda and Brenda really had a hard time understanding why it needed to be this way. And we were doing laundry together and so the idea came to me to share with Brenda why it's important to use all of these steps. I said, Brenda, "What is it like when we're washing clothes and we only use water?" And she looked at me and I remember her face. She's like, "Why would I even do that?" And I said, "Yeah, right. I mean, it's effective, but it's not really effective if you really want to get your clothes clean. If your end goal is to get things the way they need to be with your laundry, what do you need to do?"

And she's like, "Well, I need to add soap. I can add bleach. I can add fabric softener and that gets my clothes where it needs to be." And so I relayed this metaphor because it made sense to her, besides we were doing laundry, that when you're doing Effective Praise, doing effective praise is more than just one thing. When you couple it with the other steps of describing the positive behavior, and giving a meaningful reason of why that behavior needs to be repeated or

## [The ADHD Smarter Parenting Podcast](#)

giving a meaningful reason for that behavior to your child, you start to notice that things brighten up. Things are better and your child gets it. Your child understands why this is necessary. Why this is important that they continue to behave in a positive way. So in working with Brenda on this ability to memorize the steps, we had to print them out, which we did, and you can find a [printout on the Smarter Parenting website under Effective Praise](#), the lesson.

We had to print them out and we had to actually write down what she was going to say. Now the reason that it was helpful for Brenda to write down what she was going to say for specific behaviors was because in the moment she struggled finding the words. And that is not something that is rare. In fact, most parents do struggle with this skill in that sense. And so I highly recommend that you take some time to write down meaningful reasons of why your child should behave a certain way so you can have them on hand and it's easy reference for you. That takes more guesswork out of what you're going to do and your implementation of this skill. So with Brenda, we wrote down meaningful reasons of why it was important for him to sit still, why it was important for him to listen without interrupting, why it was important for him to make eye contact.

I mean we started with some pretty basic things. And again, these weren't grand things. They were simple things that she would use for giving a meaningful reason and then describing the positive behavior. So we wrote those out and then we Role-played them. We practiced them over and over and over again. Brenda was able to observe me using the skill with Evan throughout the course of the intervention. I remember my first visit with Evan, he didn't talk at all. In fact, he just sat in his chair, his arms were folded, he'd roll his eyes. And yet even during that negative interaction, because I'm describing that, I Effectively Praised him for sitting there quietly. This isn't one of those nuance things that a lot of parents struggle with because in their agenda, in their mind, their child's should behave a certain way and that's what they're looking for. With Effective Praise and the way we do this skill, we're going to praise anything that we see that they're doing which is positive.

So I praised him for sitting quietly, at least during the first meeting. So I said, "Hey, you're looking at me. You're sitting quietly. You know when you sit quietly like that, it shows me that you're willing to work on this so I can give a good report to your probation officer. Good job." Because that was something that was motivating to him. He wanted to get a good report because he did not want to leave his home, even though he was having a hard time with his mother. So I continued to praise him. First visit was that way. Second visit was that way. Third visit to the home. And I visited this family-like four times a week for a couple of hours at night and after school. It wasn't until. Get this. It wasn't until the fifth visit that he actually spoke to me and it was a waiting game for me, but I continually praised him for different things he was doing well.

Sitting still for one. The other one is I gave him an assignment sheet and I put it in front of him and I said, "Hey, well thank you for looking at that." And I praised him and describe "When you're looking at that, it shows me that you're willing to work through this so I can give a good

## [The ADHD Smarte Parenting Podcast](#)

report to your probation officer." Now during the fifth visit, I went with him to his probation officer and the probation officer was asking how things were going. And I remember this vividly. Evan looked at me and I looked at Evan and I reported to the probation officer using praise, exactly everything that I had said during the initial four visits. The visits that I had with him. Now Evan had not really talked to me really. However, because I was praising him for consistently doing this and I said, "Hey, this is demonstrating to me that you're willing to at least entertain this idea and be compliant for your probation officer," that's what I reported.

I said, "Well, Evan sits quietly when I'm there in the home. Evan looks at the assignment and he doesn't talk back. And so he's able to listen really well and he's able to be obedient and patient." So I reported these positive things to the probation officer and the probation officer she was hilarious. She kind of gave this side glance to Evan and looked at me and now nothing I had said was untrue. Everything I said was absolutely true because he did that and I praised him for it, right? And yet she looked at Evan and like, "Wow, this is really different. Like you have changed quite a bit." And I saw this smile come across Evan's face and it wasn't one of these devious smiles, but more of a like, wow, okay, okay, okay. And we left the probation office and we had become immediately fast friends.

It was pretty hilarious to me. So we were talking more, he was more open to communicating with me. This is what Brenda had seen is this opening up and this blossoming of this young man who was highly, highly aggravated towards other people. He's a rough, tough kid. Been in the system for years. [Diagnosed with the ODD](#). Had issues with vandalism, skipping school, violence, aggression and yet he was calm around me and able to communicate. We implemented this and I taught this skill to Brenda so she could start to implement this with him. The beauty of Effective Praise is that this is a skill that is entirely something the parent does, right? And it's a mind shift for the parent to be able to notice and catch your kids doing good things.

Now, Brenda's issue is, again, I had mentioned this before, she was highly critical. She was always focused on the negative. And so my goal was to help her realize exactly what good things were happening, which is why we had to write down some of these things beforehand so she would know what to do. Now while we practiced that, of course, Brendan was saying, "This feels so phony to me. She's like, I don't get it. I don't understand." And I'm like, "Well, it feels phony because you've been so focused on being a critical parent, right? You've been a critical parent. So what we're doing now is we're working where he's at. Praising the good behavior he has." And I likened it, at least in our discussion that when you start to do that, what happens is the child opens up to a new possibility of being able to do more positive things.

Once they feel like they're doing one positive thing, it actually blossoms and it grows. Just exactly the same way as when you criticize a child it tends to shut them down and they shut down in other ways. So you can choose your interaction with your child. If you're going to Effectively Praise your child, it will open up other possibilities for noticing the good that they're doing, praising them for that, and then your child acting out more positively. Or you can be

## [The ADHD Smarte Parenting Podcast](#)

critical of your child and then they'll act out more that way. One of the powerful things that I learned from one of the trainers when I was initially doing homework was that for children they cannot see the good if you cannot see the good as a parent.

I've always loved that statement. If children cannot see the good if you cannot see the good. So take some time parents and notice the good things, the small things. Now your child is going to need correction. I totally get that. And that was Brenda's thing. While I'm going to praise him for this, that's not going to solve the issue of correcting him for certain things. And I said, "Absolutely it's not, but it will open up the way to communicate about that. It will open up your ability to influence him for good if he feels like you're there to support him and you're able to notice that he's trying."

This is one of those critical things for a lot of parents when they're focused too much on criticism is that it does shut down a child. It does make them apprehensive about talking and sharing and actually problem-solving with their parent because they feel like my parent doesn't get me and why would I talk to them if they're only going to pick up the bad? That's a common statement. I remember when I was a young child those are the thoughts that came through my mind. And I really, really hope parents take this skill as something that they can use Effective Praise consistently in their homes and with their children. Because what you tell your children, as a parent, often is the confirming voice that they hear in their head when they grow up and when they become adults. It's that inner voice that they hear that gives them either strength or makes them feel unworthy or weak.

And so we want to be able to be affirming. We want them to be able to notice the good, we want to be able to give them that permission and that power to realize, "Hey, I may not be perfect in all areas, but I'm good in this area and I can improve here and that will improve in other areas as I grow."

So back to our story with Brenda. We practiced this with Brenda. Now there had been years and years of criticism that she had to work through and she felt fake in giving the praise initially. But what she found, and what I found, is the more she started to praise her child, the more open he became to it. The more open he became to responding to her appropriately. Now, he did not self-correct and become this absolutely wonderful open child to his mother because there was a lot of hurt in there that still needed to be resolved. However, they were on a path towards correction in their relationship with each other because Brenda was willing to Effectively Praise her son.

Now it changed Brenda too. So not only did it change Evan, but it changed Brenda's perception of Evan. In our last meeting together, Brenda admitted that her son actually was a good kid. When we initially met, she was so frustrated and she loved her son but did not like him. She loved him but did not like him, and by the end, she's like, "I can honestly say that I like and I love my son and I know he's doing his best."

## [The ADHD Smarter Parenting Podcast](#)

It was powerful. [It was very, very powerful and all from the scale of Effective Praise.](#) We learned other skills during this intervention, but this one was the skill that really transformed everything in their lives as mother and son. Now I had to make those corrections with Brenda on regular praise and Effective Praise. The differences between those two. And I had to teach Brenda how she could implement it and use it. A big part of that was having her practice it. I practiced it with her, she practiced it with me. We continually practiced until it felt comfortable for her to do.

You as parents may feel uncomfortable. My suggestion is to write it out what you're going to say, so you are prepared and you're ready for when those instances happen that you're using the skill. My other suggestion is if it feels fake, that's okay. It's because you're not used to it. It's like a muscle you haven't used in a long time. You need to keep doing it in order to strengthen that muscle so it does become powerful and it does become useful to you. So don't be afraid and don't let that thought in your head, "I feel like I'm being fake and this is all fabricated." Don't let that influence your ability to exercise that muscle because the more you exercise it, the stronger it will be.

Now, the one thing that I do want to state if you watch the Effective Praise video that is on the Smarter Parenting website, Hillary actually explains. Hillary is a mother, and she shows two examples of parents using the skill, is that she makes mention of something that I think is super powerful and that is you can find reasons to praise your child even during difficult circumstances. Even when they are being difficult. It may take you some time to really look on it, look at what's happening and look at them, but really take some time to find a reason to praise, regardless of the situation. There's always an opportunity to praise. You can use this skill with other people as well. I find myself because I use it so much and I've done it for so long that I naturally just praise pretty much everybody and it has made a huge difference in my own life because I noticed that people are doing the very best that they possibly can.

I know people are absolutely doing what they can do and that they're behaving the best that they can under the circumstances. I've also found that it changes my relationship with people. People do enjoy being praised. Some are uncomfortable by it, but for the most part people enjoy being recognized for the good that they're doing, and your children are no different. They need this. Now if you have younger children, I do want to say that the step of describing the positive behavior and giving a meaningful reason, those steps are super, super important because young children are concrete thinkers. And when I say concrete thinkers, what I mean is children do not understand abstractions. When you say, "Good job" for something that they've done, they cannot connect that to anything unless you connect it to something. So you need to connect it to the positive behavior and then give a meaningful reason of why they should repeat that positive behavior. Okay?

I wanted to go over the steps and then talk to you about how you can use this now with your own child. So the steps to Effective Praise are number one as a review, because reviews are good and that we do that here at Smarter Parenting all the time. As a review, the first step is to show approval and find a positive. Second step is describe the positive behavior. Third, is to

## [The ADHD Smarte Parenting Podcast](#)

give a meaningful reason. And fourth, is to give reward. And that step is optional. You don't always have to give a reward, but the first step, if you're not going to give a reward, at least say, "Great job" again or "Good job" or "Well done" or just to wrap it up in a nice package. You're kind of bookending your praise by doing that and it's a nice package and keeps everything in remembrance for your child.

So show approval. If your child is throwing a tantrum... I want parents to think about this. If your child is throwing a tantrum, take some time to take a breath, observe what is going on and find something positive that they're doing. Now a lot of parents are like, I don't even know where to praise anything like that. I will tell you this, I have done this. Yes, I have done this multiple times when children have thrown tantrums.

And I remember in one instance the child was throwing a tantrum on the ground and I praised her for breathing. I know it sounds super odd, but by focusing on the breathing, she was like, "Oh wait, I guess I am breathing." So I was like, "Hey, I noticed that you are having a tantrum. You know, and that's not a positive or anything like that, but I'm like, I noticed that you're breathing really well. You're breathing really well and getting a lot of air in your lungs. And when you do that, it helps you to calm down and it helps us so we can talk about what's happening so we can work towards getting what you need."

So in that way, if you notice the things that I said follow along the steps of finding a positive, deep breathing. Describing the positive behavior, "When you breathe, there's a lot of air in your lungs," right? And giving a meaningful reason, "When you're able to breathe like that, you can calm down and we can talk about what you need in order to get what you want." Yeah, it sounds super weird, right when I put it that way, but it doesn't take a long time to do those. It doesn't. And you can always find a positive behavior regardless of what the child is doing to praise to even break it up.

Now with this child, because I use this for Effective Praise, it actually brought her to focus in on her breathing and she's like "huh, huh, huh," and then she was like, "Wait a minute, I guess I do have a lot of air in my lungs." And it kind of pulled her out of that full-on screaming tantrum because I was responding in a positive way to interacting with her and not getting more upset and escalating the situation. So keep that in mind. There are always opportunities to praise a child for things.

Now, of course, we went back and we addressed the behavior and what she should do instead. Of course, we are going to go back and focus in on Correcting Behaviors. Effective Praise is an effective tool to help you as a parent refocus. Help your child refocus. Open up that communication and allow you guys to move to a point where you can make correction. It gives your child motivation to make those corrections.

There's so many benefits to using Effective Praise. So many benefits. There is a ratio for Effective Praise that I do need to bring up with you and that is that before you give a criticism or

## [The ADHD Smarte Parenting Podcast](#)

a correction to your child that you should have a ratio of four to one. So you want to be praising your child four times for every one time that you are going to criticize or correct the child. That seems unusually high for a lot of parents, but this has been proven to be true in establishing good relationships for your child. One way that I suggest parents do this is to keep track of how often, and with Brenda, we did that with having her keep track. She used marbles that she kept in her pocket whenever she Effectively Praised her child she would move one marble to the next pocket and just keep moving them over until she was finished and then she would make a correction for behavior.

And we did this in order to continually build rapport. This is exactly what I did in order to build rapport with Evan when I initially met with him. And that's why the relationship was formed fairly quickly, is because I kept this ratio going and he felt he could trust me. He felt like I was helpful and on his side and willing to work with him and that made all the difference. And so with Brenda, that's what we did. We had her keep marbles to keep track of how often she was Effectively Praising him throughout the day and then she could make a corrective statement or practice with him something that he needed to improve. So many useful ways to use Effective Praise. So many useful ways that you can do that. My challenge to you is to memorize those steps.

I'm going to say them again because for me, repetition is always the best and for all humans, it is absolutely the best. So I want you to be able to have this in your head and plan out how you're going to engage with your child the next time you see them, to give them an Effective Praise statement. And the more you practice, the better off you're going to be. But here are the steps. The first one again is to show approval or find a positive. Number two is describe the positive behavior that you're observing. Number three is to give a meaningful reason. And number four is to give reward, which is optional. Okay? Remember those steps. Find something they're doing well. So when you walk in the house and your child is there, and if they are able to say, "Hello" to you in a nice way, you can praise that.

You can absolutely praise that. If your child comes and gives you a hug, you can absolutely praise that, right? If your child even acknowledges you walking in, you can praise that. It may not be perfect and it may not be what you expect, but by praising them, that helps to open them up to more opportunities for communication and trust between you and your child.

So when you walk in the door, if you're listening to this at work or on the road and you walk in the door and your child is coming to interact with you, find one thing to praise about them using all of these steps. Now you may have to think about giving a meaningful reason to why that behavior is important to your child, step number three. So think about it before you get home so you can use it. For all parents, I always recommend that they figure this out beforehand because it just saves time. It's less stressful for them as well, but it helps them along the way so they can use this skill more effectively. It's hard for parents to think on their feet because there's often so much going on and so the more prepared you are, the better off you're going to be.

## [The ADHD Smarter Parenting Podcast](#)

Remember, Effective Praise and praise are not the same thing. And like the metaphor I gave with Brenda, it's like washing your clothes with just water and washing your clothes with soap and with bleach and with fabric softener and all those other things. The desired result is you want what you want, right? Clean clothes and everything's great. For Effective Praise what we want is to help them understand and repeat positive behaviors and consistently do that and build relationships. That's what we want. And in order to do that, we have to use the steps of Effective Praise. Use all the steps. So there you go with Effective Praise.

I know you can do it. I know you can absolutely do this. This is something that is simple enough that parents can grasp it really quick if they can work through their own expectations of what their child should do and how they should be and focusing on what their child is doing.

Remember if you're doing this and it doesn't feel natural at first, I understand that's a very common emotion, work through it. That's like again, exercising a muscle you haven't used. If you exercise the muscle more often, it's going to strengthen and it will be fine. And I promise you. This is one of those guarantees that I make. If you follow the steps to Effective Praise with your child, it is going to transform your life.

It will transform your life. It will transform your relationship with your child. It is one of those things I have seen over and over and over again as being one of the most monumental skills in helping parents and children heal.

Some tidbits of things just as a reminder; your confirming voice, your positive voice in their heads will be the things that they carry with them. So be careful and let's move from being the critical parent to the loving parent where we're able to notice the good that your child is doing and that's going to make all the difference in their future. Wow. We have covered a lot in this podcast. The next time you see your child, find a reason to praise them. Effectively Praise them. [Find a reason to Effectively Praise them using all of the steps.](#)

For more information about this skill, you can find a video lesson on the Smarter Parenting website. There's a video there. Hillary will walk you through the skill. And there are two examples of parents using the skill with a younger child and with a teenager. Very helpful. I think the one with the teenager is super helpful for parents who have teenagers specifically because it's easy to get into the trap of having higher expectations for teenagers. As parents, we just tend to have expectations that they will get it and they'll understand what we mean. But children are not mind readers and so highly recommend that you check that out.

And for those of you parents who want coaching on this so we can take apart what is happening in your home, and so we can do this together, sign up for coaching. You can sign up on the Smarter Parenting website for a [free 15-minute coaching session](#). And let's do this. Let's absolutely do this. I am so excited for the changes that you are going to see over time with your child and with you. That's it for me and I will see you again next time.

## [The ADHD Smarter Parenting Podcast](#)

### PODCASTS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

[Ep #50: Changing behavior through praise](#)

[Ep #56: Reinforcing good behavior using Effective Positive Rewards](#)

[Ep # 59: 4 ways to increase your relationship and fix behaviors](#)

[Ep #48: What it takes to change behavior](#)

### RESOURCES

[Behavior skill: Effective Praise](#)

[Steps of Effective Praise](#)

[Blog post: How to use the step of Effective Praise](#)

[Blog post: Effective Praise and why it works](#)

[Blog post: Parenting child with ODD using descriptive praise](#)

[Blog post: The power of praise](#)

[Free 15-minute ADHD coaching mini-session](#)

[Podcast sponsor Utah Youth Village](#)

[Support the ADHD Smarter Parenting Podcast. Donate.](#)

[The ADHD Smarter Parenting Podcast](#) with Siope Kinikini

© Smarter Parenting 2020