

# Ep #78 Creating a growth mindset in kids using Praise Approximations

This is episode 78. 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 great. Everything is going great here at Smarter Parenting. I know there's a lot of things going on in the world. Parents are spending more time with their children, which is fantastic. And opportunity for a lot of parents to use parenting skills and to learn and to help their children actually learn some of the behavioral techniques that we teach on Smarter Parenting. I've been receiving a lot more interaction with parents who are interested in parenting advice because of their increased time with their children right now. Which I think is great because if you're going to interact with your children a lot during the next couple of weeks, what a better time to learn some additional parenting skills.

I mean, it really is a prime opportunity to be there, interact with your children, learn some parenting techniques, and implement these behavioral skills from Smarter Parenting with your children. So thank you for those who have reached out.

Today, I'm actually answering one of the questions that has come up. During the past few weeks, we've been talking about Effective Praise. How to do it. [The steps to Effective Praise and what makes it so powerful](#). And in working with parents with Effective Praise, the last two podcasts have actually dealt specifically with Effective Praise.

And while I was discussing this with a parent who is called in for coaching, and I'm going to share it with you their story and their success actually with one of the concepts that we talk about with Effective Praise. This parent, her name is DeShawn, she has a son, his name is Isaiah. He's seven years old, he's in elementary school and Isaiah is a wonderful kid according to his mother. There's only a few things that she's working on with him in order to help him improve his behavior at home.

Now, DeShawn wakes up with her son and her expectation is that he makes the bed. And while listening to the podcast, she was using Effective Praise to help him continue to do that behavior, which was make his bed the way that she wanted to. That's one of the expectations in their home. So while DeShawn was helping him learn these things, she noticed that he was able to follow through with the expectation of fixing his bed in the morning the way that she wanted to. And she was really pleased with that. And in fact, what we did was we continually used Effective Praise in that way that continually guide him along that process.

So I'm going to give you the [steps to Effective Praise](#). So just as a reminder, because I think it's always important to know what we're talking about here. So the steps to Effective Praise are step one, show your approval or find a positive. Step two, describe the positive behavior and be very specific. Step three, give a meaningful reason for your child of why they should continue that behavior. And step four is give a reward, optionally. So giving a reward, step four is an optional step.

And so what DeShawn and her son, Isaiah, she would find he got up in the morning, he got his bed fixed. She would describe the positive behaviors. She would say, "Oh look, you have put your sheets up, your pillows are in place, everything is smooth. You've tucked in the corners of the sheets." She was very descriptive and then she gave a meaningful reason. "When you fix your bed in the morning, it excites you to have a great day. It motivates you because you've done something that's super important and you also earn reward."

She layered that with multiple reasons, which is actually a great thing because the more meaningful reasons that are inspiring for your child to give, the better off your child is to repeat that behavior.

Well, she found that over time, this worked really, really well. So after we started working on this and she mentioned that she struggles with him after school. And this is specifically because in their family, they have something called quiet time and in quiet time it's a time for her son to focus on reading or do something on his own quietly without interrupting her. However, Isaiah has a habit of wanting to talk to his mother and interrupt her during that time.

Now, quiet time for them isn't very long. It's only five minutes. And after the five minutes and before the five minutes, there's a lot of communication happening in the home. She wanted him to improve that behavior in helping him. Now since DeShawn was so successful at using Effective Praise with having him fix his bed in the morning, we decided to use Effective Praise in working with Isaiah on remaining quiet.

Yes, Effective Praise is another way that you can help shape your child's behavior and have them do what you want and have them do what they need to do without going into correcting the behavior. So what we had to do was do something called Praise Approximations. Now, that's what it's called in the Teaching-Family Model. And I'm going to explain a little bit about Praise Approximation to you because it's an important concept for a lot of parents to understand.

Specifically, if they're dealing with the behavior that they want to improve and the behavior isn't exactly what the parent is hoping for. Praise Approximation requires a parent to really pay attention to what a child is doing and to praise them even though they are not 100% where they need to be. So let's go with definitions first because I think definitions are super important.

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What is an approximation? Well, an approximation according to the dictionary is a value or quantity that is nearly, but not exactly correct. Now, for me personally in explaining this to DeShawn, I used math as a way to describe it because she's in a field, she's an engineering, so she knows a lot about math. But what DeShawn approximations in a math terminology is anything that is similar but not exactly equal to something else.

So it's close, but not quite. It's close, but not quite. In talking to DeShawn about approximations, we talked about how important approximations were and the reason why approximations are important in her field of study. Now, in the process of creating something through engineering, approximating has always been an important process in the experimental sciences and in engineering in part because it's impossible to make perfectly accurate measurements of something. So in DeShawn's field, they use approximations all the time to make educated decisions in what they're doing.

Now, the same that can be said about using approximations with Effective Praise. If your child is doing something well, you should be able to praise them for what they're doing well, even though your expectation is not met. Now, here's where it gets super interesting. Your expectations for your child may not be equal to your child's ability to do this specific desired behavior. You may think that what you're expecting is normal and natural for your child, but it may not be normal and natural for your child.

They may need some Praise Approximation, praising the effort, praising where they're at, at the moment for the positive behavior. They may need that in order to help them move along the path to where you believe they need to be. So this takes a little bit of parents working through this process of what are my expectations for my child and are they consistent and are they expectations that are realistic for my child? How can I praise my child for the effort and the positive things they are currently doing?

This is going to be specifically important for children who struggle with ADHD because the expectation level of teachers for children with ADHD sometimes exceed what a child is capable of doing. I want you to think of ADHD children being placed in a classroom with other children who don't struggle with ADHD and the expectation for them to function on level with everybody else behaviorally. It's a very different thing for a child with ADHD to be able to pay attention if they have inattentiveness or hyperactivity like children who do not have those issues.

And so because of that, we need to be able to adjust and we need to be able to work with them where they're at and help them increase their abilities so they can increase the possibilities and their capabilities. It's a powerful thing to be able to do that. Step back and take a look and say, "Okay, where is my child and how can I praise my child for where they're at right now in the desire to move them forward to where they need to be?"

So a Praise Approximation is entirely this. It's this idea that you are going to praise your child for the positive things they're doing, even though they are not where you want them to be, but

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they're moving towards that goal. You want to praise and help your child along the way. You're actually creating these markers along this path of where you expect them to be by using Praise Approximation and saying, "Hey, you're doing this really, really well," and then moving on from there. All right.

So in the previous podcasts, I have talked about this ratio of four to one where you should be praising your child consistently four times before you give a criticism. This is where Praise Approximation is going to work really, really well. And your ability to notice the good that your child is doing and praising them for is going to be effective. Now, I need to clarify something. You need to be sincere about what you're praising. You cannot just throw something at your child that you are insincere about or that really you don't really care about.

I mean you need to evaluate for yourself the way that you're praising your child and you need to be praising them for something that they are doing well based on what you're able to observe. So again, it's part of being descriptive in your definitions.

So let's get back to DeShawn and Isaiah. When we were talking about being able to use Praise Approximations for her and for Isaiah during quiet time, the goal was for her to observe him when he interrupts her, but praise when he's doing well and remind him of the task at hand.

[So this is what it looked like with DeShawn and Isaiah when I Role-played it with DeShawn.](#) So with DeShawn, we would start off quiet time and I would go up to her and say, "Okay." And this is over the phone because this is a coaching session. So I'd say, "DeShawn, you're doing a great job sitting still and being quiet." So notice how well I actually intervene before she interrupted me. So when I was discussing this with DeShawn, there's about a minute in between the time that they started quiet time and then Isaiah would interrupt her or come and try and find her and talk to her.

So it was during that one minute that I went and praise DeShawn for being quiet. "Oh, DeShawn. You're doing so well reading your book. Great job. When you read your book, it shows me you can follow quiet time, which really gives you more freedom later on to do other things that you need to do and that you want to do."

So again, there are the Effective Praise steps. I noticed the positive behavior. I described the positive behavior. And it gave them meaningful reason that was meaningful for Isaiah. And this is what we [Role-played](#) over and over again. What we did is we tested limits in our ability for DeShawn to praise him consistently during the five minutes right before she felt like he was going to interrupt her to help him stay on task. We're using Effective Praise as a way to shape his behavior to what it needs to be. Super, super powerful stuff.

So we Role-played this multiple times and so what we planned on doing was for DeShawn to use this before the minute was up initially and then to increase the time when she noticed he was able to consistently do that.

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What we found after a week, and we tried this for a week, is that Isaiah was able to sit still through quiet time for longer periods of time and she didn't have to praise him as much because she had praised him enough that he knew sitting still reading his book was what he needed to do.

So we're working towards getting up to there full time, but we're doing it incrementally. We're praising along the way. This is Praise Approximation. We're praising, not that he's able to sit for the entire time, but that he's able to sit still for a shorter amount of time and praising that positive behavior and increasing his ability to do it over time.

Again, we're meeting him where he needs to be and this is my hope for all parents and for all teachers who are using Effective Praise with children who struggle with ADHD, is that they're able to recognize what the child is able to do and praising them along the way to guide them to where they need to be. Moving them, increasing their possibilities and their capabilities. This is what we're hoping to do with all children.

Now with DeShawn and Isaiah, that is our goal. Our goal is for him to be able to sit still for five minutes without having him interrupt her. So we started off with one minute, it's increased to two minutes. We're going to continually do this and have DeShawn spend the time upfront praising him for this behavior. For this positive behaviors that he can do in order to increase the time until he's able to sit still for the expected time of quiet time in their home.

This is good stuff, people like really good stuff. Praise Approximation, again is anything that is similar but not exactly equal to your expectations. You're going to praise your child when they're having a hard time.

Now, let me talk to you a little bit about tantrum behaviors and praising because I did mention that in the previous podcast, [two podcasts ago](#). Super important for you to understand. And if you haven't listened to that podcast, go back and listen to it, but when you're praising a child, [you can praise your child when they're having a tantrum behavior](#).

That is absolutely possible. If your child is demonstrating that they can do something well and they usually are doing something well, you can praise that and the praise by itself is going to give them a break and give them a breather and give you a breather to recognize that, "Hey, we're not focused on everything that's going crazy out here." You're actually saying, "Hey, we're taking a break. Okay, you're doing this well and giving a reason for it and then moving on from there. It gives them the off-ramp." That's the example I gave is that oftentimes children on a tantrum feel like it's just a one-way road and they can only go on that one road and there are no off-ramps.

When you Effectively Praise a child though during a tantrum, you're actually giving them an off-ramp and they can choose, they can choose to get off the off-ramp and then have a different

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path or they can continually move down that road. But what it does is it does break this travel from accelerating and just going crazy down the tantrum highway. So you can praise when a child is throwing a tantrum.

For me personally, I have noticed that by being able to praise and being sincere about it and obviously praising them sincerely and in a way that we are recognizing the good that they're doing, it has been super effective in helping children refocus and let them know, "Hey, I'm on your side. I know you're struggling right now and I'm here to help you. I can see the good that you can do. I can recognize that even when you're having a meltdown."

What a powerful message, right? Powerful message you're sending to your children when you're able to see the good in them, even though they are struggling.

This is particularly important for children who struggle with ADHD. Not only after feeling so disconnected from the world and misunderstood, having somebody praise them for something positive that they have done will make all the difference in the world.

So during this podcast, we have talked about Praise Approximations, what it is. We've talked about being able to praise your child for where they're at and really for parents to take a step back and adjust expectations based on your child's abilities.

So Praise Approximations are absolutely important. You need to be able as a parent to remain calm, praise your child for the good that they're doing. [Praise them along this path of where they need to be.](#) You need to be able to be that flexible. It's almost like being a parent gymnast. You need to be able to be flexible in order to help your child become successful and where they need to be.

I am super grateful to work with DeShawn and with Isaiah. This has been a miraculous journey for me and for them in working through some of these issues that she's working through with her son. She called and I'm so grateful she did because she just had some small things that she felt were not really huge, but she wanted some help. She just wanted some coaching advice on how to address this specific issue and that's great.

In fact, call if there is something that you are wondering about that you're struggling with. Sign up for a coaching session. Seriously, jump over to the Smarter Parenting website. Sign up for a coaching session. First coaching session is free. We can do a 15-minute coaching session through video, televideo conference. Anyways, you can do it on your phone. We connect that way and share with me what's going on and let me give you some suggestions and some advice on what you can do because there's just so many different approaches that you can try, but I can tailor it for you. I can help you along this path so you know exactly what you can do, what would be most effective in every situation.

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Now for DeShawn and Isaiah, I do need to clarify, we focused on this skill because this was a skill that DeShawn wanted to focus on and that she was doing really well with when she was working with Isaiah. For another family, correcting his disruptive behavior may be done with a different skill based on what the needs are. This is why coaching is so important because when you receive coaching, we make it individualized and specific for you.

So for DeShawn, this was a skill that was very helpful for her and very useful and she found success with it. So we continued to use it to address this issue during quiet time in their home. For another family, we may actually choose to do something like correcting behaviors to address the quiet time issue. And this is the beauty of the Teaching-Family Model is that it is so individualized in the approach and how we help children and families, that one child is not going to receive the same treatment as another child because it's different.

You're different. Your child is different. The environment is different. Stressors are different, issues are different. So let me help you. [Let me coach you through this.](#) I am super excited to do that and I want to hear from you. I want to reach out, help you as much as possible. [So again, sign up for the free coaching session, 15 minutes.](#) First one is free and you can do that on the Smarter Parenting website.

The challenge I want to give to you as parents right now is to notice those moments when you can praise your child. Take a moment to step back, observe what your child is doing, describe what they're doing well, praise them. [If you haven't listened to the previous podcast, please do because they're very powerful on Effective Praise.](#) I actually interview a parent who used Effective Praise with their children and the long-term effects it has had on their family, starting when they were younger and now that his children are adults, huge changes have happened.

In fact, that's one that you should absolutely go back and listen to is the one right before this episode. [But my challenge to you, again, find reasons to praise your children.](#) They could use all the confidence boost they can possibly get from you as a parent and from you as a guardian, from you. They can use that. They can use that to help build them up. All right?

That's it for me for this week and I am excited actually for next week. There's a lot more that's coming in store for Smarter Parenting, so I will see you next time. All right. Bye.

### PODCASTS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

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

[Ep #59: The ADHD Smarter Parenting Coaching Process](#)

[Ep #71: Changing the brain though Role-playing](#)

[Ep #73: Preventing temper tantrums using behavior skills](#)

[Ep #76: Giving Effective Praise](#)

[Ep #77: How I learned to like my with ADHD, with Eric Bjorkland](#)

### RESOURCES



[The ADHD Smarter Parenting Podcast](#)

[Behavior skill: Effective Praise](#)

[Steps of Effective Praise](#)

[Behavior skill: Role-playing](#)

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

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

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

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