

# Recommendations and Considerations for Positive Descriptive Feedback

**Positive descriptive feedback is an evidence-based practice** that is meant to be part of the teaching process. It encourages learning. We use the word “feedback” rather than praise or reinforcement because children need to understand what they have done and why we are acknowledging it. Statements like “good boy,” “excellent job,” and “well done” are examples of praise that provide non-descriptive feedback. The child may respond positively to this kind of praise but it does not help the child understand anything about his behavior or skills. Positive descriptive feedback provides information about the behavior and is a powerful strategy for teaching new skills. These are some recommendations and considerations for using positive descriptive feedback in the classroom.

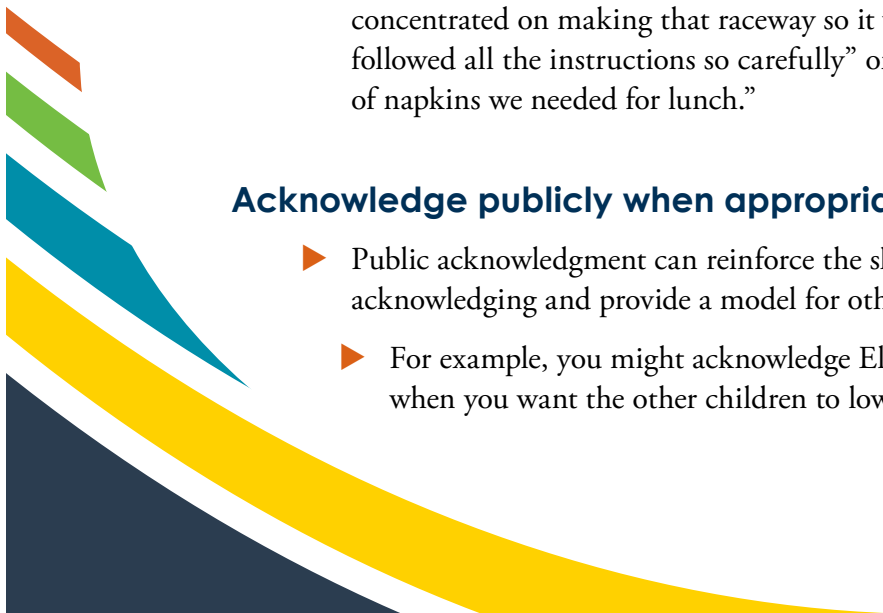


## Describe the behavior by including it in the feedback statement

- ▶ This tells the child exactly what behavior is being acknowledged and is part of the process of teaching that behavior.
- ▶ Identify and provide feedback about skills. For example: “Excellent idea. You solved the problem of everyone wanting the tall blocks by sharing.” or “What a good friend. You helped Alicia when she fell.”
- ▶ Provide feedback that describes the process the child used. For example: “You really concentrated on making that raceway so it was an exciting game.” or “Well done. You followed all the instructions so carefully” or “You counted exactly the correct number of napkins we needed for lunch.”

## Acknowledge publicly when appropriate

- ▶ Public acknowledgment can reinforce the skill or process for the child you are acknowledging and provide a model for other children.
- ▶ For example, you might acknowledge Elinor for using her “inside” voice when you want the other children to lower their voices.



## Individualize the feedback

- ▶ Use the child's name.
- ▶ Be on the look-out for children who practice skills and competencies you are teaching.
- ▶ Learn a phrase you can use as part of your feedback in the home language of the child who is a dual language learner.

## Be consistent and be equitable

- ▶ Make sure all of the adults in the classroom know how and when to give positive descriptive feedback.
- ▶ Pay attention to how and how often you and others give positive descriptive feedback. Are all adults in the classroom providing more positive feedback than correction?
- ▶ Ask yourself whether positive feedback is delivered equitably. Are all children acknowledged when they demonstrate a skill, follow directions, meet expectations, or are engaged?

## Identify the child, family and cultural norms for feedback and praise

- ▶ Make a point to talk to the family about how and why positive feedback is given in the classroom.
- ▶ Ask the family what they do at home. Different cultures and family groups may have different and very specific ideas about providing positive descriptive feedback. For example:
  - Some cultures/families don't want their child to be acknowledged for their behavior. Children are taught not to stand out or that they should want to do their best without the need for acknowledgement.
  - Some cultures value interdependence and group success rather than individual success.
  - Some children may not like public feedback but may be open to a brief high five or pat on the back.
- ▶ Work with the family to identify ways to give feedback that respects their culture but also provides children with the information they need about their behavior.

## Reference:

Bayat, M. (2011). Clarifying issues regarding the use of praise with young children. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*. 31(2), 121-128.