



"Good Job!": The Hidden Dangers of Parentspeak, and What to Say Instead

Jennifer Lehr

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Imagine if every time you praise your child with “Good job!” you’re actually doing more harm than good. What if asking a child “Can you say thank you?” is exactly the wrong way to go about teaching manners? And would you still say “I’m going to tickle you!” if you knew it had just as much potential to terrorize as to delight?

Jennifer Lehr is a smart, funny, fearless writer who, in the words of the actress Jennifer Jason Leigh, “takes everything you thought you knew about parenting and turns it on its ear.” Backing up her lively arguments with research from psychologists, educators, and organizations, including Thomas Gordon, Alfie Kohn, Peter Gray, and R.I.E. (Resources for Infant Educators), Ms. Lehr takes on “parentspeak”—the seemingly innocuous language parents fall back on when talking to their young children—and, in the process, offers a conscious, compassionate approach to parenting based on respect and love for the child as an individual.

So what to say instead of “Good job!” the next time your daughter shows off her new painting? Demonstrate actual interest by asking her to describe the work and sharing your impressions of it. And what’s wrong with “Who’s a big boy!”? It sells the idea that older is somehow better—so often used by parents trying to potty train a child—and discounts the child’s own fears about change. Readers will be surprised when they realize how often they rely on these phrases, and then become proselytizers for the wisdom of “GOOD JOB!” There’s nothing as compelling in the lives of young parents as the subject of parenting—particularly when it comes with the promise of strengthening their relationships with their children along the way.

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