Five Reasons to Stop Saying “Good Job!” (**)
Five Reasons to Stop Saying “Good Job!”

By Alkie Kohn

NOTE: An abridged version of this article was published in Parents magazine in 2001 with the title "Hooked on Praise." For a more detailed look at the issues discussed here—as well as a comprehensive list of relevant research—please see the books Punished by Rewards and Unconditional Parenting.

Lest there be any misunderstanding, the point here is not to call into question the importance of supporting and encouraging children, the need to love them and hug them and reassure them in different ways about themselves. Rather, let us begin by thinking about different ways of praising children.

1. Manipulating children. Suppose you offer a verbal reward to reinforce the behavior of a two-year-old who eats without spilling, or a five-year-old who cleans up her art supplies. That is it? It goes beyond that? Why? Because it is the point of encouragement that children need to know that they have less likely to persist with difficult tasks or share their ideas with other children.

2. Stealing a child’s pleasure. Apart from the issue of dependence, a child deserves to take delight in her accomplishments, to feel pride in what she’s learned how to do. She also deserves to decide when to feel that way. Every time we say, “Good job!”, though, we’re telling a child how to feel.

3. Reducing interest. “Good painting!” may get children to keep painting for as long as we keep watching and praising. But, warns Lilian Katz, one of the country’s leading authorities on children’s learning, “Every time we say, ‘Good job!’ we’re saying something that the child has to be given an artificial reason for being nice (namely, to get a verbal reward).”

4. Losing interest. Partly because the praise creates pressure to “keep up the good work” that gets in the way of doing so. Partly because their...