



## Teach Grace on the Receiving End, Too

Here we are in the month of February and, thanks to Valentine's Day, our thoughts turn to love. So we scurry about, buying cards, flowers, trinkets, and chocolates to let those we love know how we feel about them.

And everyone gets into the act. Little children give valentines to their classmates and teachers. Husbands and wives exchange them. Mothers, fathers, children, friends, neighbors, grandparents, the mailman, and even the family cat get a card.

Okay, so it's a little commercial—but we have to let them know, don't we?

We need a concrete way to express our feelings. Trinkets and chocolates speak for us. They say: "I appreciate and love you and I want to please you. I want to make you happy.

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I have found, however, an all-too frequent glitch in the matter of giving and receiving gifts. Some people find it hard to give, and other people find it hard to receive. This appears to be especially true when it comes to verbal gifts of compliment or praise.

From my point of view, people who never, or hardly ever, give the gift of praise deny themselves and others the pleasure of those special moments that strengthen relationships. It's like the glue that holds us close to one another. We all need affirmation from time to time, a pat on the back for a job well done, or simply the recognition of and appreciation for who we are.

What happens then when we find we're talking to a person who can't take a compliment?

No sooner are the words out of our mouths, we hear the reply, "Oh, no I'm not."

And our well-meant "gift" is returned, unopened.

Often we are told the height of the generous spirit is to give to others, but how often do we hear anything about receiving with a charitable spirit? How do we teach children to accept praise graciously? How do they learn the words to express their appreciation for praise?

You guessed it: They learn by observing how their parents handle praise and by hearing the words their parents use.

When you teach your children good manners, let them know that it is not only polite to say "thank you" when receiving a gift. That even when a gift is not exactly what they had

hoped for, it is a gift nonetheless, and it was given in a generous spirit, and it needs to be acknowledged in like manner. Model the words you'd like to hear from your children: "Thank you so much for thinking of me."

And, if you say these words to your children as often as you can when they show little kindnesses to you, in time it will become second nature for them to respond as you do.

Now...a word about excessive praise: Some parents believe that the more they praise their children, the more self-esteem their children will have. But it doesn't necessarily work that way.

A child who feels unworthy does not believe the praise he or she is offered. Besides, excessive praise can backfire. A child who is told that he or she is the smartest, most beautiful child in the world may feel pressured to live up to such high standards and could feel defeated from the start. Or he or she may come to believe that he or she is superior in all ways, which would put him or her in a class of one on the social scale—a lonely place to be.

Praise needs to be authentic and it needs to focus on the child's effort, not the child. A comment such as, "You did a fine job" is far more effective and genuine than a platitude such as, "You are so wonderful, amazing, and marvelous."

When opportunities arise to comment on a child's character, he or she would love to hear, "I very much admire your honesty, or courage, or helpfulness, or the way you handled yourself in a difficult situation."

Children take seriously this kind of honest assessment of their character. It helps them realize and value their own strengths and abilities. And, if by your example, they are accustomed to giving back, the next time you praise them, you might hear, "Thanks so much, Mom/Dad, for thinking of me that way."

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