

Your Children: Why You Shouldn't Mix Compliments With Criticism

Several years ago, my son and I had a brief conversation that has really stuck with me. It went something like this:

My son: Were you there for the first quarter of my game, Dad? I started!

Me: I didn't get back into town and to the game until the second quarter ... but you did great!

My son: Oh.

Me: But you really need to start eating better.

My son: [Silence.]

So, what was wrong with what I said? Well, he understood my flight was late and so I missed the first quarter. And my compliment was good. The "but" was the problem. Instead of just praising him for his accomplishment, I criticized him for his eating habits. And that criticism crushed the compliment.

Looking back, I realize that the words I had spoken weren't the same words my son heard. The moment I said, "But you really need ... ," what my son heard was, "What you did was good, but not quite good enough."

So, what did I take away from this experience?

First, I learned that compliments should be strong and specific. Saying "Great job" or "Good work" is a good start when complimenting. But it's even better to say something like, "I'm so proud that you made the starting team. You persevered and worked really hard to get there."

Second, I learned that criticism should not be mixed with a compliment. Criticism can be so loud to the listener that he won't even hear a compliment when they are spoken at the same time.

Third, I learned that it's important to compliment exponentially more than criticize. Mark Twain once said, "I can live for two months on a good compliment." Giving your child a strong compliment can greatly inspire and propel him forward. Criticizing your child, although necessary at times, can quickly take the wind out of his sail.

What is a compliment you can give to your child today? Please leave your ideas in a comment below.

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