Where we begin...

“Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand while imagination embraces the entire world and all there will be to know and understand.” Albert Einstein

Falling leaves - summer endings - and new beginnings. A time when children will be returning to school or leaving home for the first time to college or university. There will be varying degrees of excitement, anxiety, and uncertainty for both parents and children. Though transitions are a natural part of life we are often unsure of how to navigate new challenges.

I decided that it might be helpful to interview a teacher and get her insights from a personal and professional viewpoint. She began the interview by telling me that Thomas Edison failed one thousand times in the creation of the light bulb. Edison saw it a different way and said that he didn’t fail but instead found 1000 ways that didn’t work. She stated that grades are an evaluator for a piece(s) of work over a period of time that does not necessarily reflect the huge leaps a child can make.

Furthermore, perhaps what we should be rewarding is the effort children put into their learning. Recognize that children are not smart or dumb by encouraging a growth mindset whereby intelligence and basic abilities come together to create resilience. If someone assigns a child with a label there is no place to go. Let them know that failing is not because it means you are not trying. Fear of failure and/or a belief system that states you are a failure can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. She stated that she promises them if they keep working hard then it would get better even if their better is a C.

Think about the message that is sent when you reward a student for a final outcome. She suggested that perhaps what we should be rewarding is the effort children put into their learning. As the interview was coming to a close she shared a personal story. “I was a C student in math despite years and hours of studying and hard work. It just never clicked for me. I only finally got it a few years ago when my Principal showed me a new way to think about math!”
Where do we go from here...

Talk to the teacher - introduce yourself - ask what the teacher’s philosophies are - ask about what the teacher’s expectations of the students are - ask how you can help. Teachers and parents are valuable partners. Franklin Roosevelt stated: “We cannot always build the future for our youth but we can build our youth for the future.”

So....instead of rewarding an outcome share simple evaluation-free statements such as look at your sister’s face, she seems pretty happy that you gave her some of your snack. If your child is drawing a tree say that looks like a very tall tree it reminds me of when I walk in the forest. Simply put what you saw!

In closing Alfie Kohn states: In short, “Good job!” doesn’t reassure children; ultimately, it makes them feel less secure. It may even create a vicious circle such that the more we slather on the praise, the more kids seem to need it, so we praise them some more. Sadly, some of these kids will grow into adults who continue to need someone else to pat them on the head and tell them whether what they did was OK. Surely this is not what we want for our daughters and sons.

Written by:
Judy MacKechnie MTS RMFT
Registered Marriage and Family Therapist
Clinical Supervisor

Sources:
- The Schools Our Children Deserve: Moving Beyond Traditional Classrooms and Tougher Standards, Alfie Kohn, 2001

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Healthy Living Education Seminars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday evenings 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family Service Thames Valley</td>
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<tr>
<td>125 Woodward Avenue</td>
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<td>Attend all sessions or just one at no cost.</td>
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<td>Limited to 20 participants</td>
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<td>Call 519-433-0700 x 8295 to register</td>
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- Budget 101
  October 7, 2014

- De-Cluttering Your Life
  October 21, 2014

- Connections: Coping with Loneliness & Developing Social Supports
  October 28, 2014

- Communication Skills to Improve Relationships
  November 4, 2014

- Keeping Your Cool - Tips on Parenting
  November 8, 2014

- Transitions Through Job Loss
  November 18, 2014

- The Many Faces of Trauma: Symptoms, Services & Supports
  November 25, 2014

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