

PlaySense

(small is nice, too)



there is a form of praise we give our children that has always bothered me—and I use it all the time. It's when we praise our children for being big ... as in, "What a BIG girl you are!" Children usually glow from hearing these words, but I suspect their pleasure is more from our positive tone than from any innate pride about being BIG. What does being bigger entail, really? All that is required is that one get older, and getting older is hardly a personal accomplishment. It's something like that, "My how you have grown" comment that is almost impossible to resist saying to a child you haven't seen for a

by Barbara Sher, MA, OTR,
The Gameslady

while. I remember hating it as a child and thinking sarcastically to myself, “Well, what do you expect me to do—shrink?”

But, as annoying as “My-how-you-have-grown” can be, it still doesn’t have the underlying sting to it that “What-a-big-boy-you-are” does. That one implies that being big is a wonderful thing to be. So, what does that allude to about being small? Small must be a lousy thing to be—or, at the very least, it must not as good as being big.

When that phrase comes tumbling out of my mouth, I realize that I am, in fact, being verbally lazy. I could more accurately say, for example, “You’ve learned how to brush your teeth really well. I see you are even brushing the ones in the back now!” instead of the generic, “What-a-big-girl-you-are” praise. That way, instead of congratulating a child for just growing, I have given her some recognition for improving a skill.

But, it’s hard to remember to do that. First, I have to stop and think what is so great about what she did, and,

I used to hope that my children didn’t pick up on the hidden “small is not good” message.

worse, I have to break the habit of automatically praising “big behavior.” I’m not always successful, and I used to hope that my children didn’t pick up on the hidden “small is not good” message. But, one day, my when my youngest was little, she let me know she heard the latent message loud and clear.

At the time, she was being weaned into her own bed from our family bed, and I was trying to convince her to spend the whole night there and cease her nightly 2-AM journey into our bed. “Big girls sleep all night long in their beds. Your sister sleeps all night long in her bed. She’s a big girl,” I added unnecessarily.

“I big girl too,” said my then-2½-year-old. Her curls bounced as she nodded her head vigorously in agreement. “I sleep all night in bed,” she promised.

We kissed good night; she closed her large blue eyes and laid her chubby cheek on her pillow.

I had second thoughts. What if she really did stop making those nightly excursions to our bed? I would miss that cuddly little body snuggling against me, her comforting hand stroking my hair, her cupid lips softly smiling at me.

I went to bed that night thinking about how time passes and things inevitably change. Then, at 2 AM, just like always, I heard those little feet paddling toward me.

“I just a yiddle girl,” she apologized tearfully.

“I am so glad,” I whispered to her, enfolding her into my arms and kissing away the tears on her soft cheeks ...

“I am so glad.” ♦

Barbara Sher is an occupational therapist and the author of ten books on children’s games. Barbara’s books are in any online bookstore and her Web site, www.gameslady.com.