

## I-5: Create a welcoming environment

### Praise Students' Welcoming Words and Actions

Never underestimate the amount of kindness, encouragement, support and positive reinforcement your students will need. If your personal nature is to be less forthcoming with praise, go out of your way to offer it. If your personal style is to be more effusive, you may need to reign yourself in a bit to be sure that you offer praise selectively and appropriately. By generously praising students you also effectively model for students how to support one another.

#### Proactively Offer Strategic Praise

<p><b>Be specific</b></p>	<p>One of the most effective ways to teach students to embody welcoming values is simply to point out when someone else is doing so. "Tyrone, I really liked how you helped Janelle clean up her cubby. Thank you for being a good friend to her." Or: "I just wanted to point out how nicely Rosa's group is working together. Notice how everyone is actively involved and participating. Great collaborating."</p>
<p><b>Highlight improvement</b></p>	<p>In order to foster the idea that students can <i>learn</i> to support one another, point out when students make strides in this direction—and how they did so. "Tyler and Reggie, I am proud of you both for being willing to share with the class how you resolved your conflict with one another. I think Natasha's suggestion to talk about this at our community meeting was a great idea."</p>
<p><b>Indicate how following expectations yields benefits</b></p>	<p>"I know that talking about hurt feelings can be challenging. It can be much harder to admit what you're feeling than to keep it locked inside. But by sharing our feelings we take care of ourselves and we teach others how to help us."</p>
<p><b>Find the balance between generous and excessive praise</b></p>	<p>Avoid the habit of praising or rewarding students constantly for meeting a low bar. This can inadvertently send the signal that you have low expectations and can also make students dependent on your positive reaction to meet even the most basic of expectations.</p> <p>Alfie Kohn, author of <i>Punished by Rewards</i>, asserts that, "Rather than bolstering a child's self-esteem, praise may increase kids' dependence on us. The more we say, 'I like the way you....' or 'Good _____ing,' the more kids come to rely on <i>our</i> evaluations, <i>our</i> decisions about what's good and bad, rather than learning to form their own judgments." Kohn holds that a "simple, evaluation-free statement ('You put your shoes on by yourself' or even just 'You did it') tells your child that you noticed. It also lets her take pride in what she did...If a child does something caring or generous, you might gently draw his attention to the effect of his action <i>on the other person</i>: 'Look at Abigail's face! She seems pretty happy now that you gave her some of your snack.' This is completely different from praise, where the emphasis is on how <i>you</i> feel about her sharing."</p> <p><i>Kohn, Alfie. Punished by Rewards. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993.</i></p>