

## Skills for Good Parenting: Early Childhood – PRIDE Skills

PRIDE stands for **Praise Reflect Imitate Describe** and **Enthusiasm**. As a parent, you can develop these skills through child-directed play. These skills are specifically appropriate for interactions with children up to and including those in the lower elementary grades. If you can master these skills, they will provide you with a strong foundation for effective and positive communications with your child. They are variants of active listening skills that can make all interpersonal interactions more effective and productive and less confrontational. With tweaks, you can use them in a professional or social environment—or with your partner or spouse.

**Praise:** We want to praise a specific behavior or action. You tell your child what you like about his or her behavior. This sounds like: “I really like the way you’re playing gently with your toys” rather than saying “good job” or “nice work” which are unlabeled praises. Specific labeled praise tells the child exactly what behavior you like and makes it more likely that the child will repeat that behavior in the future. For reference, you should also respond to negative behavior in the same specific way. But during PRIDE time, you should emphasize the positive; you want to try to avoid “negative talk.”

**Reflection:** Reflection is using the active listening skill of repeating back your child’s words. You can paraphrase, especially when working with younger elementary school-aged kids who can find being echoed a little annoying or react negatively. Younger children really don’t notice it and it can even help with their language development skills. For example, if a young toddler said “ball” you might just reflect back the word “Ball! Nice job saying ball!” - then you’d have a reflection and a specific labeled praise together. If a child speaks in complete sentences, you might just say back “sandwich” when he or she is working with play food and tells you: “I’m making a sandwich.”

While specific labeled praise and reflection are hallmarks of communicating well with someone of any age, these **next** three practices of imitating, describing and enthusiasm are geared to young children.

**Imitate:** We imitate the child’s play. This is just what it sounds like – play alongside your child, have fun. Imitate their play. This doesn’t mean parroting or doing exactly what they’re doing, but if your child was building something out of Legos, you might say “I’m going to build something as well” and just build something alongside them, it doesn’t have to be exactly the same.

**Describe:** Narrate your child’s play, describing what he or she is doing or what you are doing together. Act like a sportscaster. This can feel a little awkward at first, but as you practice, it will become second nature. This sounds like “Now you’re putting the green block on top of the blue block. Oh, he knocks them down!”, “you took off your doll’s clothes” “you are making something on your play stove”, “you moved the train through the tunnel” , “You drew a tree next to the horse” – really, just describing the play. No judgement, just description, and this can include describing what you are doing as well. Again, this can feel a little awkward at first,

but children really love it. It shows that you're paying attention to their play and that you're engaged and interested.

**Enthusiasm.** Enjoy yourself! You don't want to do this in a deadpan or sarcastic tone. You want to jump in with both feet and enjoy the play. There is real joy in playing and children feel great when a parent is as engaged in the activity as they are.

Integrating this set of skills into how you relate to your child all at once can be challenging. If you're not used to using these techniques, it can be exhausting at first to use them intensely. Start by using and focusing on these skills for just 5 minutes at a time while playing with your child. Identify a time during the day when you are not distracted by other demands on your time (like preparing a meal or doing household chores). With practice, they will feel more natural and you will begin to unconsciously use them in your interactions with your child.

Some of the toys that we recommend for these skills are things that really allow for creative and imaginative play like blocks, Legos, tinker toys, trains, play picnic food, or drawing materials. You might want to prepare a bin with some of these toys and materials to have handy.

*You might want to pause here and take a few minutes to jot down on your worksheet some ideas for this kind of creative play with your child. Think about what you have at home that you could use with your child to develop these skills and what is a good time for you to do this – choose a time when you are relaxed and there isn't time pressure to get something specific done. Use an index card and make yourself a "cue card to have by your side when you're engaged in this intentional play with your child. It could just be a list of the PRIDE skills or you could write down some of the things you are going to try to say. You may feel self-conscious the first time you use them, but remember your child is very young and will be absorbed in the play not in paying attention to what you are doing.*

Remember, while doing this exercise, avoid giving commands, asking questions or using negative talk – things like no, don't or stop –while playing with your child. What we're really focusing on is letting the child direct the play. And again, focusing for a specific short amount of time, just 5 minutes a day, can really strengthen the relationship you have with your child. Of course, you can use these skills outside the 5 minutes a day, but the 5 minutes of conscious mindful attention to the PRIDE skills will give you a good foundation to build the "muscle" so that this way of interacting with your child will become part of who you are as a parent.

And just because these are specific skills for early childhood and elementary school age children, doesn't mean that you can't use some of them with older children. older children.

One last reminder: For the 5 minutes when you're engaged in practicing using the PRIDE skills: praise, reflect, imitate, describe and use enthusiasm; avoid asking questions, giving commands and negative talk and let your child take the lead on directing play.

As you become more comfortable interacting in this way, you will find yourself using these techniques unselfconsciously, not only with your child, but in all your interpersonal interactions. You are becoming a more empathetic and thoughtful listener, a better parent, partner, friend and colleague.