

# The art of praising children – and knowing when not to

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## *The Guardian:*

Some parents are blessed with a soul that lights up every time their little precious brings them a carefully crafted portrait or home-made greetings card. I am not one of those parents.

It is not that I don't love my kids, or that I don't appreciate the gesture. I rather like it when they come rushing up to me with a big grin squealing "Daddy, I made you a present!" But then I look down at the splodge of crayon and glue in my hand and suddenly I'm possessed by the sour spirit of Brian Sewell. Is this meant to be me? It is ... how can I put this ... it is rubbish. Really son, my legs do not grow straight out of the side of my oversized head. My eyes are roughly the same size as each other and last time I checked were smaller than my feet. My nose is not blue – and I have only one of them. No of course I won't pin it above my desk, that's where I sleep most afternoons, do you want to give me nightmares?

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So it was with some relief this week that I read a paper from the forthcoming edition of *Psychological Science*, which reports an experiment showing that adults who lavish extravagant praise on children may often be doing more harm than good. Where a child already has low self-esteem, due perhaps to having a dad like me, the more inflated the praise offered to their hamfisted paintings or bad sums, the less likely they are to be motivated to do it again. The kids' reasoning, quite understandably, seems to be to quit while they're ahead. Children with high self-esteem, needless to say, suck it up and throw themselves into the next challenge with puppylike enthusiasm. God I hate those kids.

Read the whole story: [\*The Guardian\*](#)