



Using Affirmations for Positive Reinforcement



Affirmations are verbal statements and comments that focus on identifying and acknowledging the positives that are happening in your child's life. Just like other reinforcers, they can help increase behaviors that you want to see more of from your child.

For example, if you want your child to perform better at work, you can say, "I like the fact that you went in early to help at work. That shows you are part of the team."

Or, perhaps you want your child to get along better with his other parent and stop arguing. When your child handles a conversation well with the parent, you can notice and say, "I really liked the way you handled discussing that situation with dad/mom."

Effective affirmations are genuine and come from the heart. It's important that they are specific to your child and their accomplishment(s). They can:

- Acknowledge effort - "You showed a lot of determination applying for jobs this week."
- State your appreciation - "I appreciated that you cleaned your dishes. It was a big help."
- Notice your child doing something right - "I liked how patient you were with your dad this afternoon."
- Offer a compliment: "I'm proud of you for sticking it out with counseling"
- Express hope, caring and support - "I hope you do well on the exam." "It's clear you're really trying to cut back on using (substance)."

Look at the statements below and compare responses with the highlighted affirming statement.

"I made it to work on time today."

- A. It's about time. I'm tired of covering for you at work.
- B. How did you do that?
- C. I know it takes a lot of effort on your part to get up and out of the house early enough to get there on time. That's great.

"I took out the trash."

- A. Well, it was mostly your stuff anyway.
- B. What took you so long?
- C. I appreciate your making sure the trash got out today. It's a big help.

"I haven't smoked pot in three days."

- A. What? Did you run out of money to pay for it?
- B. I appreciate that you're trying to cut back on smoking.
- C. Just tell me when you stop.

"I took the \$20 from your wallet without telling you."

- A. I appreciate your honesty.
- B. How are you going to pay me back?
- C. You must think I'm an ATM machine.

"I called the therapist to make an appointment."

- A. It's about time.
- B. What made you do that?
- C. Wonderful. I hope you connect with her and that she helps you address your anxiety.

Tip: Here are a few other affirmation starters that may be helpful:

- Watching how you _____ (e.g., take care of the dog/cat, practice drums, talk with your grandmother) makes me smile.
- You are so good at _____ (e.g., making me laugh, knowing how I'm feeling, drawing, being a good friend).
- You really help out by the way you _____ (e.g., babysit your younger sister, do the dishes, walk the dog, buy food when we're out).
- You inspire me by the way you _____ (e.g., stick up for your friends, think outside the box, manage school and your job).
- You truly have a gift for _____ (e.g., languages, music, sports, rap lyrics, making new friends).
- I particularly appreciate _____ (e.g. spending time with you hiking, playing board games together, cooking a great meal together, the way you look after your sister).

Material adapted from: The Workshop for Parents & Caregivers Facilitator Training Guide. Partnership for Drug-Free Kids & CMC: Foundation for Change, September 2018, v1.3.