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AFFIRMING STATEMENTS

As teachers, we often say positive things to children. Affirming a child's strengths is an important way to build relationships, as well as to position the child as mathematically competent. However, general or generic praise can feel insincere and unconstructive. Praising right answers or correct procedures can also convey limiting messages about what it means to be good at mathematics.

In place of generic praise, affirming statements that name specific strengths can help build relationships in mathematically constructive ways.

Common Approaches to Praise	Alternative Ways to Affirm and Name Competence
General praise "Good work!" "Great job!" "Well done!" "Awesome!"	*Name and notice specific strengths* "It was really helpful how you used your drawing to explain your thinking." "You are using the definition really well to divide the whole into equal parts. How would that work for finding 7/8 on the number line?"
General or superficial attribution of competence "You are doing such great work!" "You are really smart at math." "You are doing so well on your math work."	*Name specific features of the child's mathematical reasoning or work* "You are writing such clear and specific mathematical explanations." "Your diagrams are really carefully done. How did you figure out how to make this one?" "It looks like you connected this problem the other ones we did together, which is a really good strategy for hard math problems – to see whether they are similar to other problems you already know."
Praising a correct answer "Yes, that's correct." "That's the right answer." "You got it – good job!"	*Show genuine interest in the child's thinking* "I'm really interested in your thinking. How did you get to this answer?" "You solved that in a really interesting way. Can you tell me more about your thinking?" *Confirm the answer in order to shift the focus to the reasoning* "That's the right answer. Why does that make sense?" "That is so interesting! How did you figure that out?" "How can we prove that that answer makes sense?"
Praising a correct procedure "Yes, that's the right way." "Good, that's what you needed to do." "Exactly!"	*Affirm the child's reasoning* "I see that you made the tick marks at 0 and 1 darker. That was a really good way to make the whole clear on the number line." "You said that this piece is ¼ because it is one of four equal parts in the whole. I agree, that makes sense."