

# POSITIVE DESCRIPTIVE AFFIRMATIONS (PDA & PDA+)

*A practical guide for early educators*



## WHAT IS A PDA?

- A Positive Descriptive Affirmation (PDA) is when you notice and describe exactly what a child did well.
- Instead of saying “Good job!”, you tell the child what you saw and why it was helpful or positive.
- PDAs make it clear what behavior you want children to repeat.

### Examples:

- “You put all the markers back in the basket.”
- “You asked for help before you got frustrated.”

## WHAT IS PDA+?

- PDA+ takes it a step further.
- It includes the specific description AND adds:
  - Why it matters (for the child, others, or the classroom)
  - A link to values or emotions (e.g., kindness, persistence, courage)
  - Recognition of growth or effort

### Examples:

- “You put all the markers back in the basket. That helps our classroom stay clean and ready for everyone.”
- “You asked for help before you got frustrated. That shows you’re learning to manage big feelings.”

# Why PDAs Beat General Praise

	General Praise	PDA	PDA+
<b>Example</b>	"Good job!"	"You shared your crayons with Liam."	"You shared your crayons with Liam —that was kind and helped him feel included."
<b>Focus</b>	Vague, evaluative	Specific behavior	Behavior + meaning
<b>Effect</b>	Child may not know what was good	Child knows what to repeat	Child knows what to repeat <i>and</i> why it matters
<b>Motivation</b>	Can create praise-seeking	Builds skill & confidence	Builds skill, confidence, and purpose

## PRO TIPS FOR USING PDAS AND PDA+ IN THE CLASSROOM

- **Be specific:** Describe what you see, not just “good job.”
- **Use names:** “Ava, I noticed...” makes it personal.
- **Focus on effort and process:** “You kept trying until the block tower stood up.”
- **Add meaning (PDA+):** Connect the action to kindness, safety, learning, or persistence.
- **Keep it authentic:** Children can tell when it’s just routine praise.
- **Use often:** Especially powerful for children who don’t hear much positive feedback.

# QUICK PRACTICE ACTIVITY

Turn vague praise into PDAs+

- Examples:
  - Instead of “Great job cleaning up!” **try** → “You put all the blocks back on the shelf so no one will trip.”
  - Instead of “You’re so smart!” **try** → “You figured out how to fit all the puzzle pieces together.”
- Practice:
  - Instead of: “Good job drawing!” **try** → “You used the \_\_\_ (color/tool) to make \_\_\_ (specific detail), and now your picture shows \_\_\_ (outcome).”
  - Instead of: “Nice work sharing!” **try** → “You gave \_\_\_ (object) to \_\_\_ (peer’s name), which made it possible for both of you to \_\_\_ (activity).”
  - Instead of: “Great listening!” **try** → “You looked at me and followed the direction to \_\_\_ (action), so we could \_\_\_ (result).”
  - Instead of: “You’re so helpful!” **try** → “You picked up \_\_\_ (item) and put it \_\_\_ (location), which helped everyone get ready for \_\_\_ (next activity).”
  - Instead of: “Wow, you did it!” **try** → “You kept trying until you \_\_\_ (specific accomplishment), and now you can \_\_\_ (new ability/next step).”

## Formula for Success

**PDA = DESCRIBE WHAT YOU SAW.**  
**PDA+ = DESCRIBE + ADD MEANING.**