

# Super Strokes: Powerful Messages to Lift Self-Confidence

The major alternative to judgmental, retroactive praising about quality of performance is to provide statements—which I call Super Strokes—that are always encouraging. These remarks can motivate and uplift all students. More reliably uplifting than after-the-fact judgmental praise about quality of performance, these statements are generally more reliable at nourishing healthy self-esteem.

## 1. Gratitude

Be thankful and appreciative of the students' acts. "On behalf of Justin, I want to thank you." "Thank you for folding this paper for me."

## 2. Social impact

Classmates, school staff or animals are pleased or benefitted by the students' actions. "Would you like me to post your drawing on the wall, so all of us can enjoy your efforts?" "...I'm sure King George (the class Guinea pig) likes to have his tummy rubbed like that."

## 3. Sharing a skill

Let their strengths be of benefit to each other. "Now you can play your kazoo for all of us to hear"..."Would you please show Elliott how to hold the paintbrush."

## 4. Empathy

De-emphasize the quality of students' performance. Instead, focus on their enjoyment of whatever they are asked to do. "I can see you enjoy doing that"..."You really like to work with clay, don't you!"

## **5. Reciprocal favor**

Help students learn that as they show kindness to others, others will respond back in similar fashion. "I'm sure Andrea will want to play that game with you tomorrow since you taught her how to play it today"... "When you ask politely like that, Bruce would be glad to let you use his pen."

## **6. Uniqueness**

Highlight aspects of students' personal uniqueness as they become apparent during the activities of the day. "You really like to use that shade of blue in your drawings, don't you!"... "Squeezing that ball seems to help you concentrate."

## **7. Self-determination**

Invite students to make choices reflecting their needs and wants. "What do you think you could do now after what just happened?"... "What are your plans for next time?"

## **8. Self-impact**

Students can take actions that result in positive benefits to their own interests and welfare. "Building up that knowledge will help you get better grades at school"..."You're improving your coordination by doing the Brain Gym exercise."

## **9. Material impact**

Students can improve, nurture, beautify, enhance and otherwise influence in positive ways plants and objects in the environment. "When you water and feed these plants, they will grow"..."Your efforts with the scissors can make the border look more attractive"

## **10. Acknowledge effort**

One of the best ways to encourage students is to comment favorably on how hard they are trying. "I can see you're putting a lot of work into this project."... "That must have been quite a challenge to memorize all those lines!"

## **11. Label the accomplishment**

Simply describe in a few words what students have done. “You zipped up your jacket all by yourself!” ... “You drew this picture just for me?” ... “You washed the board before I even asked you!”

## **12. Highlight strength**

Emphasize strengths instead of weaknesses and shortcomings. Try circling the correct answers in red and commenting on how many were done successfully. “This part seems easier for you now” ... “It looks as if you’ve got this mastered.”

## **13. Encourage description**

Invite students to talk about their experiences and describe how they approached their tasks. “Tell me about your picture” ... “I’m interested to hear about what happened for you in the sensory area.”