



# 14 Positive Phrases for Taming the Gaming

(Without Blaming or Shaming  
Your Kid, Tween or Teen)

A proven tool to help parents manage  
video game habits in a complex and  
distracted world.

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## Dear Positive Parent,

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### What if...

**...your tween** voluntarily got off Minecraft or Clash of Clans when it was time for dinner/homework/bedtime/anything else?

**...you could** reconnect with your tween who has been captured by the screen sucking siren of online games and virtual worlds?

### Don't get me wrong

**I LOVE my family.** I ENJOY technology. But I STRUGGLED with

some of the...shall we say... less constructive technology habits in my own family. Look, every family is different and there is no "one way" to raise a child. How could there be? Each parent has their own unique set of circumstances, values, experiences, strengths, and needs. So always do what works for you and your family.

**BUT there are proven parenting tools that make a positive outcome much more likely.**

### Diamond Swords at Dawn... Really?

**A few years back**, I faced daily battles to get my tween off Minecraft. "How long have you been on that computer? I said dinner was ready three times. Get off that game now!" As a tween with attitude, he often responded with insolent remarks, defiant stares, and angry outbursts that I would not have dared use with my own parents. My constant nagging made us both feel awful and had absolutely no impact.

Growing resentment only added to the increasing disconnect in our relationship.

I was tearing my hair out. Was Minecraft a force for evil or a positive educational tool? Was my son's Minecraft obsession due to his easily distractible nature? Or was his distractible nature exacerbated by Minecraft? Was I a bad parent because I wanted to limit severely his screen time? Or was I a bad parent because I wasn't developing his potential as the next Steve Jobs?

### A few years later

**As a teen**, my son very rarely played Minecraft. Don't get me wrong: he still adored technology, enjoyed coding, loved having a laptop for school, and didn't block out digital distractions as well as he should. But he also did drama, played sports, read vociferously, and talked to me about global politics. He found me annoying at times but still allowed me regular hugs. So what changed? Our focus, habits and relationship.

**And what started the change?**



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# The Magic of Descriptive Praise



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**My epiphany began** with the expression: “What you pay attention to grows”. I noticed that my son’s screen time was the primary (and very negative) focus of our mother/son interaction. If I constantly brought everything back to Minecraft, how could I hope to shift his focus away from it? I paid little or no attention to his positive behaviour. Like his schoolteachers, I focused on his disorganization, fidgetiness, and blurt-ing out rather than his quick wit, massive empathy, and natural debat-ing skills.

Descriptive praise helped me pay attention to growing his self-confi-dence and rebuilding our relationship. It also helped me to remember what an amazing kid he is. Descriptive praise means noticing and then specifically describing to your child what you like about their behaviour. For example:

- ‘Thank you for putting some of your dirty clothes into the laundry basket. That helps us make sure they are ready when you next need them’
- ‘You fed the dog today without my asking. He looks very happy’.
- ‘I see you are seated with pencil ready and your notebook open. You look ready to go.’

**Praising a specific behaviour** (‘descriptive praise’) is more effective than vague and judgmental compliments (‘evaluative praise’), such as ‘good boy’ or ‘clever girl’. By noticing and describing the positive things that a child does, parents clearly convey what behaviours and values will gain approval. All of us, child or adult, distractible or not, can be motivated by approval that feels sincere, specific and non-judgemental. Simply put, descriptive praise kicks off a powerful cycle of positive motivation, constructive habits, and intrinsic self-confidence. My screen-hungry tween needed that deeper nourishment.



# A Practical Approach

*But what if it seems that my child isn't doing much to earn praise at the moment? And what if I don't really know what to say?*

Don't worry, descriptive praise is a habit anyone can learn with practice and a willingness to 'catch your child doing good.'

After years of keeping my eye out for things that my son would (or could) do wrong, I had to retrain my sensors. I also learned how to start small (sometimes, very small). For example, when a child who talks a lot has a moment of silence, it's an opportunity to catch that moment: 'You stayed quiet while I was thinking. That was considerate.'

## **But how did I know what to say?**

On the one hand, descriptive praise feels like it should be easy just describe a child's positive behaviours. On the other hand, all new habits take practice and, for me, the phrases didn't roll off the tongue. In fact, I noticed that when my tween did something right, I usually said... well... nothing. (Why should I? That was what I expected).

To combat this tendency, I created a 'cheat sheet' to get me started. It was my version of 'fake it until you make it.' The words and phrases became more natural with practice. Out of genuine interest, I even began to ask

him questions about Minecraft and he let me peek into his world. I secretly miss those Minecraft lessons with my son.

## The Real Impact

**Over time**, descriptive praise can strengthen your relationship with your child and help him or her develop better habits for life. The questions I had about the value of gaming are no longer as important as I thought. What really mattered was the change in my parenting approach.

**To get you started, I have listed 14** examples of descriptive praise specifically focused on screen time and Minecraft. These phrases come from my own experience and with input from parenting coaches like The Parent Practice.

I have focused the phrases a bit more on Minecraft because specificity makes descriptive praise more powerful. But you can easily modify to suit your child's game or online distraction of choice.

In some ways, you could think of the list as "14 phrases to begin to de-Minecraft your child". But I prefer "14 phrases to help your child find his inner Obsidian". (Trust me on the Obsidian, just ask your tween).



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## Descriptive Praise: 14 Positive Phrases for Taming the Gaming

01

**I see that** you're coming to dinner right away. You're coming the first time I asked. (To be said after even the slightest move away from the computer, TV, game console, etc.)

02

**You didn't go** on Clash of Clans/ Minecraft/any other game until you finished some of your homework. That is very responsible of you.

03

**You stopped** arguing even though you're not happy that I asked you to get off the computer. That shows a lot of maturity.

04

**I can see** that you're angry but you've restrained yourself and not sworn at me. That takes self-control.

05

**You remembered** to start the timer. You're helping us stay on plan tonight.

06

**Thank you** for staying at the dinner table even though you want to have your screen time. That shows you remembered the rule.

07

**I really appreciate** your asking me politely for more time. It helps both of us stay calm.

08

**You and** your brother took turns on the computer without arguing.

09

**I like** the fact that you have learned to keep your voice down when playing Minecraft with your friends.

10

**I appreciate** the fact that you fit both playing the game and watching YouTube videos about the game into your screen time limit. You managed your time well.

11

**I see that** you have a really good build there. I also love the variety of textures. It looks like you worked really hard on this. *(Better yet, why not let him show you? Kids love to be the teacher and see their parents struggle a bit.)*

12

**You have** carefully planned your Minecraft shelters. How do you make sure that you do all the things you need to do before nightfall – and monsters – show up?

13

**You seem** to manage your faction effectively. What agreements did you create so that everyone works together?

14

**You have** created some really complex things in Minecraft. I wonder if you could recreate something from real life in the game?



## Plus 3 Bonus Phrases to Create Calmer Parents (a bit of 'self-DP' never hurts)

01

**I used** descriptive praise today. I discovered the good things my children do.

02

**I kept my** voice calm and didn't take everything personally.

03

**I kept my** descriptive praise cheat sheet on my phone. I was very well-organised and ready for screen time.



## Learn more about Descriptive Praise:

- "The Grateful Letter, Descriptive Praise in Action" from The Parent Practice
- "Descriptive Praise: The Most Powerful Motivator" from Calmer, Easier, Happier Parenting
- "Bedtime Battles" from The Parent Practice

## Learn more at Habyts:

- "How Screen Limits for YOU Can Help Your Children" from Habyts
- "5 Shocking Facts You Probably Don't Know About Screen Time and Kids Health" from Habyts
- "4 Essential Steps to Help Your Angry Child Stay in Control" from Habyts
- "Motivating Kids to Do Chores" from Habyts
- "A Routine World: Why Kids Crave It" from Habyts

## About the Author:



With three tech-savvy boys, Cynthia Crossley is the founder of Habyts, the family habit-building app that helps regulate screen time usage, motivate kids, and build better family habits.

Using her own family as a test case (they don't seem to mind the experiments too much), Cynthia will share her ongoing journey with you (what worked, what didn't) which might smooth your journey (or at least be good for a laugh).

*Let's share the journey...*



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