**So Proud of You**

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[Zara Maqbool](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/zara-maqbool)

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A very common practice I have noticed amongst people is how when we share an achievement of ours with family or friends, the immediate and most common response is, I am proud of you. I would very often respond the same way, without giving much thought to my words. Now as a therapist, I am curious and want to understand the need behind this affirmation that we give to others. How and why do we take pride in someone else’s achievements?

I understand that this phrase expresses pride for someone’s accomplishment and carries a sense of respect and admiration. But I also see it as a bit contradictory now as it seems to denote that this person had something to do with the accomplishment.

When my friend congratulated me on completing my book, her response was, I am proud of you Zara. I felt uneasy and it was as if she was forcefully trying to take ownership of a process that completely belonged to me. Her words also made me feel as if I was accountable to her for completing this book and that I was seeking her validation and affirmation.

I think this commonly used phrase is rooted in the parent and child dynamic. I think as adults, our internalized parental voice responds to another friend or family’s accomplishment to their inner child.

The important question to consider here is, who owns this achievement?

A Macquarie Dictionary definition of ‘proud’ is: ‘feeling pleasure or satisfaction over something conceived as highly honourable or creditable to oneself’. The key words are ‘creditable to oneself’. So - when a parent says, “I’m so proud of you”, is the parent taking the credit for the child’s accomplishment? I also find this phrase an as external judgment – a parent’s verdict on a child’s performance. Parents have always used this term as something the child has to earn to hear. The child starts to believe that he must have done well enough for the parent to say these big words – the ‘proud’ word and unconsciously their life goal becomes more about their parents. Children should be encouraged to aspire and work towards goals for themselves not for their parents because that in a way takes away the complete ownership of that journey from them.

This phrase is rooted in praise and validation which is great but only when it’s not conditional. It’s like the child’s process gets hijacked and becomes about someone else than themselves. Children who are continually praised, or told “I’m proud of you” may not believe their parents. They may start to see their parent as being insincere, or even manipulative.

Someone else’s pride in you does not usually translate to pride in yourself. If a parent can say, ‘I’m proud of you’ then the child’s psyche feels the pressure and fear of what would it mean if he doesn’t do what brings pride in the child. This can stop the development of their inner experience and the locus of evolution becomes more external than internal. Such children become adults who can easily attach their goals to another person like a spouse or boss. Such people find it hard to find pride in their achievements and struggle with self-worth.

The phrase “I’m proud of you” insinuates that the other person has more has more experience or power, and can declare an opinion on someone else’s effort.

It can make the other person feel patronized, by the other person’s unsolicited ownership and judgment of my achievement.

So next time when you hear someone’s accomplishment, rather than telling them you are proud of them, tell them, ‘I am happy for you’, ‘You should be proud of yourself’ and both these phrases should be used by parents with kids and with other adults.

Zara Maqbool
The writer is a BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psycho-therapy) accredited individual and couple psycho-therapist based in Islamabad. She can be reached at zaramaqbool@yahoo.com.