Setting Boundaries

Therapist Neurodiversity Collective International

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Therapist Question of the Day:

"One of my neurodivergent students opened up to me today and told me that she doesn't like to receive "girly compliments" about her hair, clothing, appearance, etc. We researched compliments and learned that everyone likes to be complimented in different ways. We made self portraits and wrote on them the kinds of compliments that we like to receive - you're kind, smart, helpful... We practiced how we could respond to those close to us who give us compliments on our appearance - "Thank you but I prefer to receive compliments on my personality or actions instead." But I'm really not sure if that's helpful. Any advice on how we can work through this? She states her parents and RBTs most typically use the "girly compliments" so I want her to be able to voice her concerns to them in a supportive way."

Therapist Neurodiversity Collective's Answer:

Re: "her hair, clothing, appearance" - maybe these kinds of 'compliments' feel sexualized to her? Side note - It is inappropriate for RBTs (Registered Behavior Technicians - ABA therapists) to be complimenting a female student on their appearance. Rather than teaching her to say "Thank you, but..." why not empower your female student with self advocacy skills to set boundaries with others? How about teaching her how to respond with declarations such as - "When you compliment me on my appearance it makes me feel very uncomfortable, so please don't." Just because someone compliments a young girl, it doesn't mean they must compliantly reply with a sweet or polite response. Help your student to develop ways to express her discomfort and her feelings. She needs to know that it isn't wrong to disagree with others and that she has the right to speak up for herself. Our neurodivergent girls need to feel empowered that they have the self-autonomy to say "No," or "That makes me feel uncomfortable," "Please don't," or "Stop."

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