The best way to teach is to praise positive actions and ignore negative ones.

Write a response in which you discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the recommendation and explain your reasoning for the position you take. In developing and supporting your position, describe specific circumstances in which adopting the recommendation would or would not be advantageous and explain how these examples shape your position.

Teaching requires a lot of planning – be it the schooling of children or the training of pet animals. People tend to have very different opinions when it comes to using positive reinforcement, or punishing negative actions. In my opinion, I mostly disagree with the prompt’s claim that negative actions must be ignored when teaching, albeit only to a certain extent. There are three main points that should be considered when evaluating this issue.

First, when dealing with this issue, what naturally comes to mind is the teaching of schoolchildren. It is completely normal for children to make mistakes during their education, but they must learn from these errors so as to not recommit them as adults. Consider a school where the teachers only praise the students’ positive actions, not batting an eye towards their negative ones. If the students indulge in mass plagiarism during their assignments, and the teacher does not reprimand them due to their focus on positive reinforcement, the students would not learn from such a mistake. They may grow up and get into academia, but would not have the ability to think or write in an authentic way. Even if they somehow get their acts together and try to write authentically, it would take much more effort for them to do so, as compared to if they were honest in school. Hence, teachers must at least acknowledge such negative actions, and ensure that the students develop holistically.

Second, it is important to note that, at times, people are unable to see their mistakes even if it is right in front of them. In such cases, reprimanding them would be the necessary course of action. Take the example of Gordon Ramsay and his television hit-series ‘Kitchen Nightmares,’ where he tries to help restaurant owners around the world to make their businesses prosper, by targeting the issues that persist within. Often, the owners are unable to see the ill effects of their actions, or they are blind to the realities of the business, such as the importance of taking customer feedback seriously. Ramsay generally gets an insight into the workings of such restaurants from the staff and waiters, who are more likely to see the problems from the outside, unlike the owners themselves. He pinpoints everything wrong with the restaurants/hotels and forces the owners to reevaluate the things that become normalised to them. If Ramsay were to only praise positive actions, these owners would never improve, and could pose a health hazard to its patrons. The episodes of this series are proof that people who want to learn and improve ought to look at the negatives – who better to show those negatives to them, than a mentor or teacher?

Finally, while taking the negatives into account, it is important to not blindly adopt this teaching philosophy to all aspects of life. Consider training animals like cats or dogs: Research has demonstrated that these animals are incapable of learning via punishments, and are more likely to learn through positive reinforcement. Jackson Galaxy, a YouTuber whose videos revolve around helping cat owners train their cats, has investigated this issue. His videos also prove that positive reinforcement is vital for pets, and he informs his viewers and the cat owners of how to better deal with their pets. The cats, who may be skittish or uncomfortable with the owner when first adopted, grow to love them over time, when they are rewarded for their positive actions.

In conclusion, in my opinion, the prompt’s claim is not fully true or false. However, in most situations, it is necessary for teachers/mentors to point out negative actions of whoever they aim to teach. Only by understanding both the positives and negatives can teaching truly achieve its aim.