

## **CHILDREN AND COMPETITION**

**David Lowenstein, Ph.D.  
Psychologist**

- Children are bound to compete in many ways, for playground space, toys, and even adults attention
- We live in a world where competition is inevitable, it's a natural part of life
- On and of itself, competition is neither good nor bad, our job as parents is to channel children's competitive urges in ways that are good, that benefits the child's development into responsible adults
- Unfortunately, we have glorified competition and celebrated winning to the point where children have a difficult time competing in a healthy way
- In sports we see parents getting extremely upset when their kids don't win the game
- As adults we tend to think only of the benefits of competition, leading us to encourage competition in our children as a way of preparing them to succeed in life
- Healthy competition can help a child have more energy and spirit, it can stimulate better performance
- Competition can also interfere with good performance and even lead to depression
- Children are quick to notice when we say one thing and do another – they follow our examples not our words
- As a result it is up to us as parents to set a positive example for helping our children develop healthy attitudes towards competition
- It is far better for parents to emphasis kindness and cooperation over competitiveness in their children

### **Guidelines for Setting Healthy Competition in our Children**

1. *Parents need to examine their own lifestyle:*
  - Children look to their parents for role models
  - If they see their mother or father focusing more on getting a promotion than on the needs of the family, they are likely to grow up to be competitive too and forget their own emotional needs in favor of economic goals

2. *Reduce the competition between siblings:*
  - Sometimes parents compare their children without even realizing it – “Why can’t you be like your brother and keep your room clean?” or “Your sister understands math, why can’t you?”
  - If you do this as a parent try and minimize it, then your children will feel less competitive towards each other and it will result in better family relationships
  
3. *Parents must emphasize learning over grades:*
  - These types of parents don’t encourage their child’s academic performance efforts by offering money or gifts for every A and they don’t punish a child for earning poor grades
  - It is more important that they recognize that children need to learn for the joy of learning – because they are naturally curious about the subject, not because they fear they won’t live up to expectations
  - It is better to think of grades as guides, indications of a child’s special talents or signals of his/her need for assistance
  
4. *Parents must accept a child as she/he is:*
  - The parent must love their child with their likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses – and not push them to be someone that they aren’t
  - A child who feels secure about themselves and has high self-esteem will not have an urgent need to get ahead simply for the sake of winning or being the best