**6 Ways to Encourage Healthy Competition in Kids**

**Source-** [www.marthastewart.com](http://www.marthastewart.com)

**By-** Ariel Scotti

Competition isn't only about winning or losing. For children, it means learning to share and take turns. Healthy competition teaches kids empathy, the pride that comes with hard work, and the self-esteem of knowing they tried their best. But these honorable attributes don't develop overnight, they take practice and guidance. Here's how you can help:

1. **INSTILL EMPATHY:**

Winning is great but forgetting others' feelings can quickly create a situation where a child is perceived as unkind.

"Healthy competition means being a good friend and supportive of others, even if they lost," says Liz Morrison, a licensed therapist who owns her own Manhattan practice and specializes in child and adolescent therapy. "One thing I ask kids sometime is, ‘If you lost, how would you feel?' Parents can do a little role play, too. You can say, ‘I'm gonna be the person who loses, what can you say to me to make me feel better, and what can I say to you if you lost to make you feel better?'"

1. **TEACH THEM ABOUT TEAMWORK:**

Through competition, kids learn how to share and take turns. But there are ways to prepare them for this at home, too.

"We practice sharing in therapy with board games like Candy Land, it gets them to let somebody else try." she says. "If they're on a team, let them know, ‘I wonder how your teammate would feel if she got to pass the ball, it would make her so happy.' Sharing the joy of the game helps them understand that they're a part of a team, and the whole team has to work together."

1. **MOTIVATE THEM TO TRY THEIR BEST:**

Children with a healthy sense of competition learn from an early age that they should try their best and give their all to everything they do. But what if they're not quite there?

"Instilling kids with a solid competitive nature means asking them what their goals for themselves are, not what their teachers or parents want," says Morrison. "If your child isn't trying so hard, I would try to understand why. There's usually a root to the problem, like getting teased or bullied. Talk about what's going on there." And if your child is really just apathetic, you need to go a bit deeper. "I would use the future as an example," Morrison says. "I'd say, ‘You're only 10 now, but one day you'll be an adult, what do you want to do?' You can use that to work backwards to motivate them to get to that place."

1. **INCENTIVIZE IT:**

Just like adults, kids like working towards a goal. Whether it be an extra hour of screen time or a sweet treat, associating competition with earning something they want is a good way to get kids excited to work hard, especially if you're working with siblings.

"If there's an issue between siblings, have them work towards it together to get the prize instead of competing against each other," Morrison advises. "If they're really competitive suggest that they give each other a compliment instead of teasing or name calling. When they're good, they get a point, and the point system leads to their prize."

1. **MAKE IT A FAMILY AFFAIR:**

For kids who need a little bit more practice, the best and most comfortable space for them to work on it is at home.

"A good way to get those competitive juices flowing is by organizing a family game night," Morrison suggests. "It gets everyone to take turns and implement those important social keys. I recommend certain games that involve sharing, turn taking and encourage a dialogue about feelings like Chutes and Ladders or Connect 4. Building this foundation for discussion will then apply in other competitive situations throughout their lives."

1. **FIND A BALANCE:**

Winning isn't everything and trying to win at everything can be exhausting and make kids feel like they're under too much pressure. Part of having a healthy sense of competition is understanding that you're not going to be good at everything, and that's okay.

"To help kids who are feeling upset that they're trying hard but not doing as well as others, parents can say, ‘You're better at X, and we all have different things we're good at, and that's what makes the world go ‘round,' Morrison says. "The message I always send is as long as they are really doing the best that they can, then it doesn't necessarily matter if you are the best. What matters is always striving for your personal best."