

After the Buzz, social thinking ideas for parents and caregivers

From *What's the Buzz?* A social skills enrichment programme for primary students



Lesson 5: competition, winning and losing

This lesson reviewed the facts about competition, winning and losing. It promoted the idea that the best way to feel like a winner every time is to enjoy the game by playing for fun and friendship. The lesson also explored practical ideas about what to say and do following a win or loss. Here are a few sensible ideas parents can use at home to support their children's capacity to cope with winning and losing.

Highlight what you value

Show that you value the process of playing every game in a friendly way. Winning may well be a goal, but should not be seen as the single most important product of playing games. Discuss aspects such as; laughing, enjoyment, companionship, sharing, intimacy, learning, helping, supporting, teaching, modelling, caring, practice, giving it a go, personal best and so on. With this in mind you might like to play several of the games played in the lesson at home.



Grow through losing

Although we live in times where it is fashionable to have all children feeling as though they are winners rather than being exposed to the disappointment of losing, one can't help wincing about the short sightedness of this contemporary thinking. Perhaps, in measured amounts, it can be helpful because through experiencing losing our children learn;

- none of us are good at all things and nor are we expected to be.
- we lose because we were not as skilled as the other person at that time.
- to appreciate the winner's talent in the context of humanity's astounding diversity.
- effort and commitment can never be taken away.
- how to re-group their emotions, bounce back, persist and strive.
- how good it feels to honestly win or succeed
- to control feelings by being gracious in the face of defeat or disappointment

Winning – maybe or maybe not

Prior to your child participating in any kind of game raise the fact that they have a chance of winning and losing. That's the way it is! Remind them to do their best, enjoy and play for personal satisfaction. Continue to encourage them to promote themselves in the best light as this will persuade others to think well of them.

Home practice

By rehearsing what your child can do when things don't work out you give them the chance to pre-think or intellectualise a tricky situation. Later, as they draw on their coping skills this earlier work provides them with a helpful edge. A supportive idea is to play games with your child at home. Allow them to win, but discuss how you are enjoying the game and their company first and foremost. When you lose demonstrate friendliness and graciousness. However, from time to time, aim to win the game and coach your child to react well. As they lose jump in and say, "Great game. I could see that you were disappointed." "You're a good sport. I'm impressed!"

Watch winners and losers

Whether your child's team wins or loses point out the players who handle the situation best. Ask, "How did they act?" "What did they do?" Also, watch how the players in televised sporting matches handle their emotions after winning or losing. Generally speaking players at the top level model impeccable skills and this is worth drawing your child's attention to. And, on the odd occasion where a player does something inappropriate, then you have just scored a golden teachable moment!

Competitive sports

Parents often ask about the value of their child joining a sporting club as a means to improve friendship and attitudes around competition. In our experience this is questionable. For children who do not have well developed social or sporting abilities, and find losing just too much to bear, the pressure cooker atmosphere of competition can be devastating. It's not long before their frequent emotional meltdowns build a reputation they could well do without.

What should I do when my child tantrums in public after losing a game?

There are a few guiding principles worth keeping in mind. When your child becomes thoroughly overwhelmed it is not the time to give advice, lecture or tell them off. A sensible approach is to calmly and swiftly remove them from the situation. What they need is time to regroup their emotions without looking ferocious or silly to others. Sometimes it is wise to invite another level-headed adult, such as the coach, to carefully intervene. Later, in calmer times discuss what happened and how it can be better handled next time. Sometimes the best decision is to suspend their participation in highly competitive sports for twelve months which may offer them time to mature.



*"Money might make you wealthy, but friends make you rich."
Anonymous*

