

If you are a parent or close to anyone with young children, you have no doubt witnessed something akin to the following scenario. It's a beautiful day and the 3rd grade little league baseball game is in the bottom of the 7th inning (the last inning of most little league games). The bases are loaded with two outs and the team at bat is losing by one run. Up to bat comes the smallest and youngest player on the team. The terrified child is well known for missing the ball. In fact, the child usually cringes before the pitcher even lets it go. The coach, also the father of one of the players on the team, pats the little one a pat on the back and offers encouragement as the player goes up to the plate. Suddenly, from the stands a voice shouts: "What are you crazy? That kid stinks. Why don't you put in someone who can hit so that we have a chance?" The little boy freezes up and begins to cry.

Unfortunately, the above situation isn't make-believe but happens all too often. It adversely affects not just the little player coming up to bat, but also his or her teammates who now feel the pressure. What a shame! After all, this isn't the pros. It is merely a little league game with 3rd graders, which should provide an opportunity to teach these children baseball and socialization skills and help them develop positive self-esteem. Yet, situations like these do just the opposite.

Competition is a way of life and we need to teach our children how to compete in order to survive. However, we need to communicate that competition does not need to be negative. In fact, if done well, competition can be a very rewarding and positive experience whether we win or lose. Whether in sports, the arts or academics, doing one's best should be the goal. The effort, not winning, is what builds self-esteem. If we teach the difference to our children –verbally and, more importantly, by example – then they will learn that it is okay to fail and that failure can help develop new skills. These kinds of lesson will enable our children to grow up with a sense of confidence and an excitement about trying new things, not a fear of failing that prevents them from taking chances.



The big question for a parent is how to provide a child with a sense of confidence. This is not an easy task. All of us as parents bring our own childhood frustrations into our present parenting. Therefore, we may try to live out our own frustrated dreams through our children. Our expectations from them then become, in reality, extensions of our own expectations of ourselves and we never truly demonstrate our acceptance of our children for their own potential.

The little league father who screamed out became too involved in dealing with his own frustrated needs from childhood to empathize with the individual needs for the children on the little league team. It is true that winning isn't everything: it is how you play the game that is important building positive self esteem and competitive spirit is the cornerstone for future success for our children. They need to have fun and support to thrive.

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