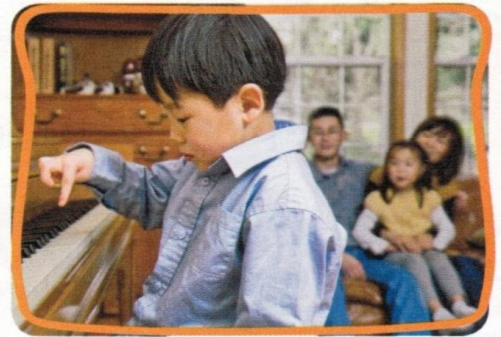


7 to 8

Measuring Up

Comparing your child to others can harm self-esteem

BY MICHELLE ANTHONY, M.A., Ph.D.



WE ALL do it. It happens as naturally and unexpectedly as sneezing: “Why can’t you study as hard as your friend April?” “If you hustled like Jimmy, you could score more goals.” The sentiment behind these ideas is positive; most parents make comparisons to try to motivate their child to improve. Although there is the rare child who hears these words and is kicked into gear, more often than not, these words sabotage the very goals parents seek.

A GROWING DIVIDE

As 7- and 8-year-olds begin to excel (or lag behind) in areas such as sports, arts, and school, they also start to mentally rank themselves against other children. Many children undervalue their own skills and develop feelings of self-doubt. Enter the well-meaning parent, pointing out how he doesn’t stack up to his peers, and the child ends up with external reinforcement of all his worst fears about his own deficits.

Children need the unwavering belief that their parents

believe in them. Your child understands that no matter how good she is at something, there is always someone who is better. Thus, when you compare her to others, you unknowingly set her up to compete against peers for your admiration, respect, and in essence, for your love and support.

SAY THIS INSTEAD

Try describing what you notice without mentioning another child. For example, “You almost scored a goal! A little more hustle in your step and you’d have it. Let’s practice at home.” State your hopes in a positive framework, without comparisons, emphasizing belief in your child’s abilities and support to help him develop them. Doing so turns your desire to motivate into a tool to build your bond with your child. **P&C**

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