

INSIGHTS

by Michael Grose - Australia's No 1 parenting educator

Do you compare and compete with other parents?

Comparing your child with others is a stress-inducing and, ultimately, useless activity.

Do you ever compare your child's behaviour or progress with other children of the same age? If so, you are causing stress for yourself and your child.

Comparing your child with others is a stress-inducing and, ultimately, useless activity.

BUT it's hard to resist as we tend to assess our progress in any area of life by checking out how we compare with our peers.

When you were a child in school you probably compared yourself to your schoolmates. Your teachers may not have graded you, but you knew who the smart kids were and where you ranked in the pecking order.

Now that you have kids of your own do you still keep an eye on your peers? Do you use the progress and behaviour of their kids as benchmarks to help you assess your own performance as well as your child's progress? This is okay, as long as we don't lose sight of three important aspects:

1. Kids develop at different rates.

There are early developers, slow bloomers and steady-as-you-go kids in every group so comparing your child's results or performance can be completely unrealistic.

What this means for you: Focus on your child's improvement and effort and use your child's results as the benchmark for his or her progress and development. "Your spelling is better today than it was a month ago."

2. Kids have different talents, interests and strengths.

Okay, your eight-year-old may not be able to hit a tennis ball like Raphael Nadal, even though your neighbour's child can. Avoid comparing the two as your child may not care about tennis anyway.

What this means for you: Help your child identify his or her own talents and interests. Recognise that strengths

and interests may be completely different than those of his or her peers and siblings.

3. Parents can have unrealistic expectations for their kids.

We all have hopes and dreams for our kids but they may not be in line with their interests and talents.

What this means for you: Keep your expectations for success in line with their abilities and interests. If expectations are too high kids will give up. If they are too low, they will usually meet them!

Parents rightfully should take pride in their children's performance at school, in sport or their leisure activities. You should also celebrate their achievements and milestones such as, taking their first steps, getting their first goal in a game or getting great marks at school.

However, you shouldn't have too much personal stake in your children's success or in their milestones, as this close association makes it hard to separate yourself from your kids. It also causes you to play the "**compare & compete game**" – i.e. by comparing kids you can put pressure on yourself and them to perform for the wrong reasons.

And certainly, your self-esteem as a parent should not be explicitly linked to your children's behaviour or developmental levels.

"**You are not your child**" is a challenging but essential parental concept to live by. Doing so takes real maturity and altruism, but it is the absolute foundation of that powerful thing known as 'unconditional love'.

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