

WHEN THEY DON'T MAKE THE TEAM

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Nobody would argue about the fragility of a child's self-esteem. We only need to look at adult behaviors to observe the long lasting effects of the emotional challenges of early life. Every one of us will recall how we felt when we didn't win, when we only made a C grade, when we didn't get picked for the orchestra, the game or the school play. How a child responds to that feeling of 'failure' is totally at the mercy of those who care for them.

Children love a challenge. They want parents to have high expectations of them. They want to be recognized when their efforts produce the success they seek. So, it is imperative that parents make clear what their expectations are. It is also important that those expectations are realistic and attainable for each child. 'Realistic' includes understanding that in a race there can only be one winner. That means the child may have one chance in ten, twenty or one hundred of being that winner, so it is not realistic to put pressure on the child to win every race. They need to work on bettering their own performance rather than be measured by who crossed the line first. That, at least, is what they have some control over. Being 'attainable for a particular child' means that each child has different skills and abilities so parental expectations need to correlate accordingly.

Children should not be given value for their performance only. They need to know that they are accepted and loved for who they are and not just what they do. There also needs to be a balance of recognition amongst all children so each feels an equal sense of worth.

Author, Dr. Meg Meeker, points out the importance of a father's affection on daughters in particular. "When a Dad hugs his daughter, she gets the extremely important message that he sees her and he likes what he sees. Her father's feelings about her are far more important than her performance on any soccer field." She goes on to say that it is of greatest value to highlight a child's positive character traits rather than place worth purely on performance.

We need to prepare our children for times of failure. Stuff happens. We won't meet our own or others' expectations all the time. We all have 'off' days. At these times we need to simply evaluate the situation, change what can be changed for a better result next time and then move on. At those times when our kids are hurting, they need to feel validated, so concentrate on their positive traits and abilities. Nothing is gained by dwelling on what happened. That situation can't be changed, but it is their response to it that makes the difference. We all need to periodically evaluate how we feel about ourselves. If we know we don't handle failure or negative criticism appropriately then we need to do something

about it quickly. If we don't, we can't help our kids overcome their negative feelings either.

The bullies of this world, the gossips, the mean, the belligerent, those who fail to take responsibility for their own actions; all suffer from not feeling worthy or at peace with themselves. When our internal 'value bank' is full, we see the positives and know that to stumble is not to crumble. We learn from it and move on. Let's teach our kids to be team players, that everyone has a part to play, and that winning is not everything, although our culture tends to reinforce that.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.