



SIGNPOST

Competition - Good or Bad?

Dr Sitara Vikram talks about the benefits of being in the right kind of race



To answer this question, one needs to investigate the role of education. Education should help to prepare children for success in the real world. Competition is a part of life - there is competition for the best schools, the best colleges and for the best jobs. The truth is most things that are worth aspiring for face significant competition.

Therefore, competition should be an integral part of education, as it enables children to prepare for the real world. The problem with competition is that it creates stress, so preparing children to face competition in the right spirit is beneficial in later life.

Competitions (including exams) are not inherently evil - it is the compulsion of having to win / score A+ that creates stress. Children need to compete and give their best, treating failure and success in similar spirit. The ability to handle disappointments is a key skill that children have to learn. The Bhagavad Gita says "perform your activities giving up attachment to both failure and success. This is what is meant by equanimity."

Competition should be healthy. The attitude of parents is important - they also need to learn to face outcomes with equanimity. The focus of competition does not have to be on the child's performance versus her peers - children need to be applauded and appreciated for every improvement they make in relation to their own performance. A child that puts in a good effort should be acknowledged and encouraged to try better the next time.

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have a clear framework and a transparent evaluation process. Children need to participate enthusiastically in intra-school and inter-school competitions. Schools should educate children to cheer not only the winners, but also all the participants. Sensitivity to low performing students should be ensured.

Competitions also help maintain quality of schools. External examinations and competitions put pressure on schools to improve their performance. They prevent schools and students from being left behind.

Competitions therefore are not bad; it is the stress of winning that has negative consequences. Take away that stress and students will come to enjoy and learn from competitions. Character, self-esteem, team work, leadership and the ability to handle disappointments develop through participation and prepare children for the future.

Watch this space every alternate week for information on various aspects of education.

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