

VOICES IN SPORT

SAY SOMETHING IF YOU SEE SOMETHING



IMPACTS OF COMPETITION

A guide to healthy and unhealthy competition.



WHAT IS...

HEALTHY COMPETITION?

Healthy competition encourages us to work harder, push beyond perceived barriers and strive to be our best. It motivates us, giving us a tangible target to set our sights on.

Often, competition extends the boundaries of what we think we are capable of.

Healthy competition also teaches us how it feels to lose, which is a recurring challenge throughout our lives.

It can be healthy to compete with yourself, even when you compete with other people if it leads to compassionate self-improvement. Wanting to be the best version of yourself is natural, but shouldn't be exhausting.

The focus should be on your personal development, and more importantly at its core, competition should be seen as a form of fun, particularly when children are involved.

UNHEALTHY COMPETITION?

Unhealthy competition is the innate drive in individuals that want to be the best using whatever means necessary to achieve 'greatness'.

One of the negative consequences is 'self-image' concerns and it refers to disliking competition because of the fear of failing or being perceived negatively.

Competition is often driven by fear. Fear that not being the top performer will result in less status or worse, termination. In most cases, those are not rational drivers when you take a step back, even though they may be very real in the minds of the individuals.

Unhealthy competition can also drive an 'us and them' culture, meaning everyone else outside of the club are seen as a threat and should be eliminated causing hatred.

It's important to remember that achievers are always favoured. Those who cannot accomplish the same are often left feeling inadequate. If they fail measuring up to the ideal being shown, many of these individuals will begin experiencing feelings of inferiority and complete dissatisfaction with their performance and even their life.

Impacts of unhealthy competition...



ON CHILDREN

Excessive and unhealthy competition can naturally cause the following on children:

- Stress
- Fear of failure
- Anxiety
- Self-doubt
- Envy
- Anger
- Excessive or undue pressure from oneself and/ or coach/ club/ parents/ peers
- Feeling inadequate or inferior
- Comparison
- Perfectionism
- Disappointment for letting themselves, their coach and their club down
- Disorders such as OCD, eating behaviours etc.

ON COACHES

In comparison to the list for children, the impacts are very similar, although the difference here is the coach can push their unhealthy competition ideology onto children.

Excessive and unhealthy competition can naturally cause the following on coaches:

- Stress
- Fear of failure
- Anxiety
- Self-doubt
- Envy
- Anger
- Impatience
- Excessive or undue pressure on oneself and/ or parents/ peers
- Feeling inadequate or inferior
- Comparison to other achievers
- Perfectionism
- All or nothing mentality
- The use of manipulation and control tactics
- Disappointment of underperforming athletes.

Strategies for coaches to avoid unhealthy competition...

IN CHILDREN

- Do not compare them to other athletes who may be achieving more than themselves.
- Inspire them through praise to improve just their own abilities.
- Teach them that mistakes are completely natural, it is human nature and doesn't mean we are a failure.
- Be aware of your body language and tone of voice. Even if you are saying the right things, it doesn't mean the child is not able to read your undertone, if you don't believe it yourself, how will the child?
- Remind the child that they are valued and have a voice.
- Look for the signs of unhealthy competition (stated above), this is a clear indicator that something isn't right. It is the coach's responsibility to identify and address these possible impacts so they do not carry on, including inner reflection.
- Ask the child how they are feeling, particularly after under performing, this is when children are at their most vulnerable. Reassurance and a positive mindset is crucial to a child's mental welfare and this starts with the coach.
- Speak up when others are acting untoward to a child, this means having a zero tolerance to bullying, name calling etc. Children will be looking to the coach for guidance and will closely pay attention to what is and isn't acceptable. The coach needs to lead by example.
- Remember children are still growing and learning, therefore extra patience and understanding is required. Imagine yourself in their position, what would you want to hear/ see in this moment?
- Encourage children to reflect on their journey so far, on how much they have already achieved.
- Remind children of who the Welfare Officer is and what they do, if they don't want to speak with you, chances are it could just be because it needs to be someone else.
- Educate yourself on each child, what is 'normal' behaviour for them could be different for another, each child is different and requires different levels of care, it is your responsibility to meet those needs and look out for 'abnormal' behaviour.

WITHIN THEMSELVES / CLUB

The key to changing the way in which competition is handled within clubs is by first addressing how coaches view competition themselves. If they are not being driven by the right behaviours, the vicious cycle of unhealthy competition will continue.

- Recognise that not everything is within your control, especially children's performance. There is only so much you can teach so don't be hard on yourself if things don't always go to plan.
- Important things to ask yourself are, what drives my competitiveness? Is it truly a feeling of needing to be the best? Is it a personal response to the other person or club - that you want to beat them? The more you educate yourself, the easier it is to recognise what improvements in your behaviour are required.
- When competing, you might believe outdoing your rival will make you happier. Therefore, your happiness will depend on the outcome of the competition. You'll be sad if you lose the competition. And if you win, you'll not be truly happy because you'll worry about the possibility of your rival outdoing you. Recognise this cycle and check in with yourself.
- It's ok to take a break. If you are noticing you are experiencing unhealthy competition either in yourself or in your athletes, this is the perfect time to take a break, reflect, recover and maybe even seek medical help. It's important you take care of yourself as well as your athletes, if you aren't in a good mindset, chances are, neither are your athletes.
- Take responsibility, a good leader doesn't control or manipulate, they lead by example, they listen and treat others with integrity and respect.
- Remind yourself that you are teaching children and therefore their mental maturity will differ from yours. The way in which you teach will need to be age appropriate and ensure your expectations are reasonably aligned with their mental capabilities.

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