

Parenting Tips
By
Cyndy Jacoby, UWEX Family Living Agent

The Effects of Comparisons

How would you respond to your boss and co-worker after the boss made the following statement? “Thanks for your effort on this project. But if you would have worked more like _____, who’s on your team, you could have earned yourself a raise.” Would the co-worker become the model for your behavior or would you begin to resent your co-worker? Would you gain more respect for your boss?

Parents and teachers often use similar comparisons with the intent to motivate children to improve their behavior or skills. Unfortunately, it most often has the opposite effect. Let’s look at examples that illustrate the effect of both favorable and unfavorable comparisons made by parents.

Unfavorable comparison:

Father: “How come your sister manages to get both her homework and chores done before supper?”
Childs thoughts or reaction: She does everything right. Sometimes I hate her.

Favorable comparison:

Mother: “I wish your brother would pick up his things like you do? Your always so neat, it’s a pleasure to have you around.”
Child’s thoughts or reaction: Mom likes me best. I feel sorry for my brother.

When a child is a target of favorable comparison, it may give the child a vested interest in keeping the other one down in order to preserve his or her own ‘favored status.’ A child experiencing unfavorable comparison feels defeated and has little incentive to change. Additionally this child may become resentful of his sibling or peer to whom he was compared. In either situation, the outcome does not motivate positive relationships or behaviors.

The competition created by comparisons may spur some accomplishment, but it comes at a price. Studies show that when competition intensifies, people develop both physical and emotional symptoms. These can include headaches, stomachaches, backaches, anxiety, suspicions and hostile behavior.

If our homes are to be havens from the stresses of the world, comparisons need to be avoided. To resist the urge to compare, describe to the child ONLY the behavior that pleases or displeases you. For example, “The jacket belongs in the closet,” lets the child know what behavior is expected without bringing other siblings into the issue.

Additional information on avoiding rivalry can be read in the book, **Siblings Without Rivalry** by Faber and Mazlish. You may also request a handout, “Growing Up with Brothers and Sisters,” by contacting Cyndy Jacoby, Trempealeau County UW-Extension Family Living Program, PO BOX 67, Whitehall, WI 54773. **Phone:** 538-2311, Ext. 209 or toll free 1-877-538-2311, Ext. 209. **Email:** cindy.jacoby@ces.uwex.edu



