

It's Not a Competition!

3/30/23

Sarah here. We hope that you enjoyed last week's blog on miscommunications. This week, we're talking about another communication woe that can create a lot of conflict: conversational one-upmanship.

Imagine you're having a typical dinner with a friend, co-worker or significant other. How does the conversation likely go? If you're like most people, you'll probably ask the other person how their day went, they'll ask you how your day went, and maybe you'll both share stories about your day. Sounds innocent enough, right?

Depending on the energy and context of that conversation, this innocent "how was your day" chat can quickly become an exhausting exchange of war stories about daily hassles, workplace drama and petty office politics. It can start to feel like a competition to see who wins the "I had the crappiest day at work" award. Somehow, when we're trying to share, sympathize and relate to the other person, we overdo it and end up in social comparison mode.



This doesn't just happen with our co-workers, friends, and partners. Imagine that your child or teen mentions that they feel stressed, overwhelmed, or exhausted from their long day at school. Or maybe your teen or young adult child brings up feeling tired from work. You may not mean to, but you (like many people) may go into the same social comparison mode with your kids in this situation. Maybe you point out that they can't imagine what tired *really feels like*

because they don't have a "real job." Maybe you laughingly ask them what they have to be stressed about.

We don't think most parents are competing with their kids on purpose. But, by drawing these kinds of social comparisons, parents are inadvertently dismissing their kids' thoughts, feelings, and experiences. When this situation shows up repeatedly, kids may be less likely to open up and talk with their parents in the future.



How can you avoid conversational one-upmanship with your family? Remember that no matter how old your child is, their thoughts, feelings, and experiences are valid. They are allowed to feel tired or stressed or overwhelmed, just like you are now. It may be hard to remember, but if you're honest with yourself, you likely felt some of those same things when you were their age.

Remember that conversations are about communicating- not competing. Focus on listening. Reflect back what your child says to make sure you understood them and to let them know you're paying attention. Provide empathy and encouragement with your verbal and nonverbal cues. And, if your child is looking for support or solutions, be there to help them problem solve. Using these strategies will likely help you sidestep conversational one-upmanship and—as an added bonus—you'll likely have a more enjoyable and engaging conversation with your kids!