

XP3: Comparison Trap

from the Andy Stanley Collection

We're Teaching This:

On a scale of one to ten, how do you measure up? Are you tall enough? Pretty enough? Smart enough? Funny enough? And on that scale, which number represents *enough*? Do you have to score a ten or will a solid seven do? How about a five? It's better than average, right? Most of us measure how we're doing by how everyone else is doing. Not a day goes by that we're not tempted to glance to our left and to our right to see how we measure up to the people around us. This is especially true at school. We see everyone else's grades, clothes, athletic ability, talent, and popularity. And it's easy to feel like we don't measure up. So we adjust course, try harder, spend more, and then compare again. It's exhausting. In this 3-part series, Andy Stanley explores the difficult—but not impossible—challenge of escaping *The Comparison Trap*.

Think About This:

Parenting is hard. We probably knew going in that it wouldn't always be a walk in the park. But, as a parent, have you noticed there are some curve balls that you just don't know how to handle?

Chances are, you knew your kids were going to be different from one another. But it's also likely you had no idea just *how* different they could be until you started raising them—until they hit a certain age and suddenly what you assumed would be true of one of your kids because it was true of an older one—just isn't. Sometimes it feels like you have to learn how to parent all over again with each child. And sometimes not just with each child, but through each life-stage your children experience.

We may not do it on purpose, but there is a tendency to compare that comes so naturally and so easily. We bring attention to the ways our students are different from their siblings, their friends, our friends, and even earlier versions of themselves. It's so tempting to say, "But why can't you just be like _____?" The problem is, comparison rarely works. It doesn't make students want to try harder and it can often lead to resentment toward the parents and the sibling with whom they're compared. Even within the family, there is no win in comparison.

Sameness isn't even really a goal worth shooting for. Maybe there are traits in one of your children that you'd like the others to take on. That's great, but you probably don't want them to be exact replicas. A better goal is to be intentional in learning, studying, and celebrating the personality and wiring of each individual child.

Try This

No one wants to feel like they don't measure up. Especially not in the place where they want to feel the safest and most secure. Work on making your family and your home the place where who your child is celebrated and not compared.

This week, **point out something in your teenager that you appreciate**. Find something that you have seen grow and develop in them that is a strength and then tell them how proud of them you are.

Then find something that, at first glance, feels like something you would change—that you would compare to someone else and wish away. And then find a way to leverage it. To see the good in it. For example,

- “I know I’m often on your case about talking too much in class, but I want you to know that I also love how social you are. You are great at managing a lot of friendships.”
- “I know that I get upset when you fight with your younger brother, but I also recognize that you’re just trying to get him to act in a way that is more socially acceptable. Thanks for wanting to help him.”
- “Yesterday we had an argument about playing guitar instead of cleaning your room. While I still want you to have a clean room, I’m also really proud of you for working so hard to learn to play the guitar well.”

Finding a way to celebrate something you had vocally been frustrated over in the past will mean more than you can imagine to your student. Don’t underestimate the value of your affirmation.

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