

# september @ symbio

## upcoming presentations

### Managing Separations

For some children (and for some parents) the moment of separation is a threshold to independent discovery and adventure. For many others, it is met with anxiety, grief, even dread. Psychologically healthy separations teach children how to say goodbye, feel their feelings, but know that they are safe; and that their connection to those they are leaving persists. In this presentation we, will examine the meaning of separations from a developmental point of view and discuss how to help your child learn to manage the broad array of feelings they produce.

\*two dates:

#### Tuesday 14 September

7:30-9:00pm

@ Recess Urban Recreation

470 Carolina Street

San Francisco CA

RSVP: <https://clients.mindbodyonline.com/asp/home.asp?studioid=3210>

Recess members:

\$35/person or \$55/couple

non-members:

\$40/person or \$60/couple

#### Tuesday 28 September

7:00-9:00pm

@ Peekadoodle Kidsclub

900 North Point Street, F100

San Francisco CA

RSVP: [info@thepkc.com](mailto:info@thepkc.com)

Peekadoodle members:

\$40/person or \$60/couple

non-members:

\$45/person or \$65/couple



### Self-esteem and the Value of Winning

**Q:** *I need some help with my four year-old daughter. Everything is turning into a competition with her – and, unfortunately, she’s a poor sport if she doesn’t come out on top. This morning, leaving the house, she ran to the car and said to her brother, “I got to the car first!” This past weekend, while playing a game with her, she tried to change the rules so she could win. I went along with it because I didn’t want to deal with the fit she would throw if she didn’t win, but it just didn’t feel right. At school, her teacher says she always wants to be first in line and gets pouty when she’s not. Summer camp was a near disaster with all of the sport games they played; every day she would complain about how so and so didn’t follow the rules/cheated/wasn’t a good teammate, etc. I had to stop myself from saying, “See how it feels?!” I’m all for having a confident girl, and we really made an effort to bolster her confidence when she was young, but I’m afraid we’ve gone too far. How do I get her to understand she can’t win or be first at everything? And is there such a thing as too much confidence?*

**A:** There may not be such a thing as too much confidence, but there is such a thing as the wrong kind of confidence. This may sound odd, but it all has to do with balance. We want kids to feel capable and resilient, but we also want them to be able to make realistic judgments about the limits of those capabilities. For example, you don’t want your daughter to feel so confident in her athletic abilities that she is tempted to jump from the top of the slide. In addition, where she is confident, you want her to be confident in the right things: it’s important that she’s confident about who she is, not just what she can do.

Giving your daughter the opportunity to succeed often and showing admiration for her accomplishments are both good ways to build confidence. But too much pride

in accomplishments without a balance of positive feeling about qualities that are not based on achievement can lead to rough times for kids. Without that deep confidence, the kind that does not ebb and flow with every accomplishment or disappointment, your daughter will probably continue to be insistent on being the best, the first and the most.

Most kids who are zealously competitive and cannot stand second place are not truly overly confident. On the contrary, they have yet to develop the confidence that will allow them to weather normal disappointments and defeats. Getting your daughter to give up some of the fight over every game or dash to the car will be much easier when you can help her develop a greater sense that her worth as a person is not tied to each accomplishment.

Which brings us to your other question: how to get her to understand this? The answer is two-pronged: On one hand, you give her explicit messages regarding the personal qualities and characteristics that you want her to value, and how to develop and nurture those qualities. You can help her do this by talking with her about ideas like the strength required to be a good loser and a good sport, the confidence required to try again when something hasn't gone well the first time, and the patience required to master a new skill. She needs you to let her know, and help her believe, that the exercise of these qualities is as admirable and special as coming in first. Keep in mind though, that your words will mean much less to her than your attitude. Let her see you be a good sport, let her see you admire other people for determination rather than instant success.

She will also gauge her understanding of the relative meaning of individual victories based on how you respond to her distress when she fails to achieve one. Your daughter will need your help to reduce her dependence on the gratification she can get from topping everyone around her. Almost every one of us, even the most graceful of losers, enjoys a good win. If your daughter can always experience pleasant emotions by finding something to win at, she will not be interested in exploring the perspectives and choices that will help her deal with the disappointment involved in not coming in first.

On a very practical level, helping her understand that she can tolerate being second means that you'll need to let her lose at times. Of course, this means you will have to endure, and help her endure, some heavy protests if she's used to being able to get her way by raising the emotional ante. It will help if you can empathize with her distress

over how hard it is not to win. But let her know, in what you say and through a calm emotional tone, that her distress is not so powerful to you that you will orchestrate a victory for her.

Over time, your attitude toward your daughter's distress will be your most powerful way of helping her understand that, although she feels the world may end if she doesn't beat the pack every time, she can and will survive. If she sees that you can tolerate the distress of her disappointment, she will gradually learn to do the same.

But if your daughter feels like the fits she throws are intolerable to you, she will experience that as a confirmation that her distress is as intolerable as she feels it is. So, she will have to work very hard at avoiding the source of that distress; which means she will have to be sure she comes in first all the time. Over time, this will lead her to a sense of herself that may look like boundless confidence on the outside, but is actually quite fragile.

All this is not to say that your daughter's self-esteem depends on your ability to sail blissfully into the storms of her outrage when her brother gets to the car first. Of course there will be those days when your tolerance is at low ebb and you make choices to avoid having to deal with her throwing a fit. That's fine. The important thing is that you give her the opportunity to face the disappointment of coming in second (or even last) and make it through the experience to find that she is still loved, admired and intact to face the next challenge. Over time, these experiences will help her understand an important idea that is the key to real self-esteem: that she can be great even in the moments when she is not actively doing great things.

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