Five tips to handle competitive moms

Dr. Robi Ludwig on friends who constantly feel a need to prove themselves

**By Robi Ludwig, Psy.D.**

TODAY

It can feel like a stab to the heart. You’re planning a lovely get-together with a friend; you’ve been looking forward to it all week, when all of a sudden, a competitive zap seems to come out of nowhere. The “one-upmanship” type of comments can feel exhausting and upsetting. Daytime coffee klatches can suddenly feel like a competitive race about who has the better husband, the bigger house, is the more talented mother or has the more brilliant child.

Since friendship is so central to our emotional well-being, these kinds of incidents can feel terribly disheartening, especially when we want to feel connected and supported by our friends.

New mother Christine talks about this very common occurrence in her parttimemommy.com blog. She also observes this all-too-familiar occurrence and says, “It can be very hurtful.”

So why do some “friends” engage in this type of exhausting and futile banter? After all, isn’t the definition of a good friend someone who is able to support, love and encourage our success? The short answer to this question is, “Yes, *absolutely!”* but very often, when women are in a transition mode — which can happen when they become mothers — their identity shifts. This can get some moms to second-guess themselves and their lives. When new moms question themselves, some use competitive talk as a way to bolster their shaky self-image.

This brings us to some of the reasons why these competitive friendships happen; some believe it’s motivated by a “driven to win” mentality, which creeps into the relationship. Many women are used to the business world, where they are required to prove themselves on a regular basis. This approach then gets transferred into their parenting style. In other cases, their child becomes an extension of themselves, a way to validate their own self-worth. But regardless of the cause, this type of interaction can cause even the most confident woman to feel insecure.

So what’s a mom supposed to do? Here are some trusty strategies to help you out.

First of all, not all competition is unhealthy; in some cases, there is an emotional payoff. People only compete with people who are in their league. Sometimes this competitive energy can help raise the bar for what’s possible in our lives, and the lives of our children. It can motivate us to do better, but to prevent competition from becoming too ugly, you may want to:

1. Try to understand where your friend is coming from. Is she feeling insecure about her own life? Is she trying to bolter her own self–esteem? Is she doing this competitive chitchat with the other people in her life, too? Sometimes it’s nice to know you’re not alone.

2. Don’t let your friends dictate what your goals should be or what success is. Instead, set your own standard for success.

3. Think of noncompetitive responses like, “Wow, your child is so talented at soccer.” Or “Your job is going so well. That’s really great!”

4. To reduce the competition from escalating, don’t up the ante. Let the conversation be about your friend every now and then. Instead of a *me/her/me/her*cycle, allow it to be just about her sometimes.

5. If all else fails, you may want to let your friend know how you feel. Some friends might not even be aware of what they are doing. Pointing out their behavior can really make a big difference.

Remember, life is not just about winning. It’s about connecting and ideally supporting the people we love in our lives. True happiness comes from appreciating ourselves and our life, just the way it is. So go ahead, focus on what’s great about you, your surroundings and your child. And if you can’t turn that overly competitive friend around, it’s OK to sometimes say, “This relationship is just not for me!”

*Dr. Robi Ludwig is a nationally known psychotherapist, award-winning reporter and can be seen Monday nights on “Nancy Grace” on CNN's Headline News. For more great parenting tips, visit “*[*Cookie” magazine online.*](http://www.cookiemag.com/)