

# Running Scared



## RESOURCE GUIDE



**Connect with Kids**

- Competition Fact Sheet
- Parent Tip Sheet
- Grades 3-5 Lesson Plan
- Grades 6-8 Lesson Plan
- Grades 9-12 Lesson Plan
- Discussion Questions

# Character Traits

All *Connect with Kids*  
programs address these  
26 character traits:

Caring/Compassion

Civility

Cooperation

Courtesy

Freedom

Helpfulness

Honor

Justice/Fairness

Loyalty

Peace

Respect

Self-Control

Tolerance

Citizenship

Conviction

Courage

Diligence

Generosity

Honesty

Integrity

Kindness

Patience

Perseverance

Responsibility

Togetherness

Trustworthiness



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Grades, standardized test scores, sports, awards, extracurricular activities – the competition kids face is endless and non-stop. What is at the root of this desire to excel and succeed? What are the effects of not winning? And can they be expected to handle this kind of competition at such a young age? *Running Scared* examines these questions and details the tremendous pressure many children are under to perform well and meet the expectations of others.

**This resource guide is designed to accompany the video entitled *Running Scared*. This resource guide includes:**

- Competition Fact Sheet
- Parent Tip Sheet
- Grades 3-5 Lesson Plan
- Grades 6-8 Lesson Plan
- Grades 9-12 Lesson Plan
- Discussion Questions



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## Competition Fact Sheet

Competition – a source of energy for some, a source of stress and anxiety for others. Experts agree that some competition can be a good thing, causing us to be more alert and active, alleviating boredom and fueling our motivation. However, when competition becomes too stressful, it can seriously affect our ability to concentrate and perform well.

And when competition begins too early, or when adults apply pressure on children to compete at levels higher than they are physically, psychologically or developmentally prepared for, the children will inevitably suffer. This is particularly true for young children.

- Research suggests that before nine years of age, most children have a difficult time handling winning and losing, which can be harmful to their self-esteem.
- Research conducted by USA Swimming reports that children under the age of 12 do not understand the difference between ability and effort “in explaining successes and failures.” Unless a child shows the ability to do the above, he or she should stay with exhibition sports that are more for fun than pressured competition.
- According to a study conducted by the Institute for the Study of Youth Sports, children who generally have low self-esteem, worry a lot about failure, do not seem to have fun when participating in any competitive arena, or are overly concerned with what their parents will say or want them to do should they not participate in highly competitive sports.

Adults should be on the alert for the following signs that children are not reacting well to competition (which is not limited to sports):

- Moodiness
- Worry
- Increased self-criticism

- Fear of failure
- Crying
- Nail-biting
- Trembling
- Sweating
- Headaches

For most of us, stress is a normal part of life. According to Professor Mohan Issac, Department of Psychiatry, NIMH-ANS, “Meeting deadlines, achieving targets [and] being in the limelight constantly can all lead to stress. How we handle our own stress impacts how our children learn to handle their stress.”

KidsHealth offers the following practical steps for children to ease pressure and stress:

- Practice deep breathing. Remember when your mother would tell you to “take a deep breath” to get control of yourself? It works for everyone. Inhale deeply through the nose and expand your lungs. Hold this breath for a count of five, and then release the air slowly. Repeat three to five times.
- Relax your muscles. Tense a group of muscles tightly and hold this tension for about five seconds. Release the muscles and draw in a deep breath. Repeat this five times, each time with a different muscle group.
- Try visualization. Get in a comfortable position, close your eyes, and think of a peaceful place or a peaceful moment in your life. Recall the sights and sounds of the moment and imagine the stress flowing away from your body.
- Strive for a positive mindset. Practice positive thinking. Repeat to yourself, “I learn from my mistakes.” “I am in control of my feelings.” “I will do my best and my best is exactly right for me.”

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## Competition Fact Sheet *(cont.)*

- Be good to your body! Eat a balanced diet, get enough sleep at night and provide lots of positive input.
- Get away from the stressful situation. Go ride a bike, take a walk, get together with friends, read a book, anything!
- Stop trying to be perfect, because nobody is. Forgive yourself for your mistakes, remind yourself of your successes, and move on.

Finally, remind children that happy, successful people:

- Know who they are.
- Know what is important to them.
- Work well with others on something larger than themselves.
- Are caring and connected.
- Are skilled and effective.

## RESOURCES

*Help! A Family's Guide to High School and Beyond*  
by Susan M. Quattrociocchi, Ph.D.

*USA Swimming*

*Institute for the Study of Youth Sports*

*National Institute of Mental Health*

*KidsHealth*



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## Parent Tip Sheet

Toddlers are pressured to read and count early, to tie their shoes early, and to get a leg up on other children their age. Sports offer “pre-team” programs for three and four year olds, complete with coaches, uniforms, games and tournaments. Parents search for private coaches and select programs to cultivate their children’s skills, reciting their children’s activities and accomplishments with pride.

This is our American culture, increasingly emphasizing competition and success ... at younger and younger ages. It can drive us into a frenzy of activity and leave our children feeling pressured to “measure up” or, in some cases, simply *keep up* with others’ expectations. And when competition comes at too early an age or when we, or our children, begin to rely on trophies and other rewards to validate our efforts, problems arise.

The question raised by all is, “Is competition good or bad?” Perhaps the answer is competition is not all good or all bad, but the way it is *handled* makes all the difference.

When our children feel constant pressure to compete or be “super kids,” the effects can be devastating. According to research conducted by USA Swimming, children under the age of 12 do not understand the difference between ability and effort “in explaining successes and failures.” As adults, we need to watch for signs that our children are developmentally ready to compete in structured events.

Yet we often contribute to the pressure of success and competition – screaming from the sidelines instead of being a supportive fan; insisting that our seventh grader learn college-level spelling words for the spelling bee instead of participating in scouting events; posing our child in extreme make up and provocative costumes for beauty contests instead of appreciating their natural beauty and skills; prizing the trophy more than the participation. These are

ways that we sometimes lose perspective as parents.

So before enrolling a child in competitive activities, experts encourage us to consider the following:

- Is my child physically ready to handle the demands of the activity?
- Is my child psychologically ready to handle the demands?
- Does my child possess the social skills to compete?
- Is the competition too serious or intense for my child?
- How does my child react to pressure for performance?
- Is my child showing signs of anxiety over the competition?
- Does my child handle winning and/or losing graciously?
- Does my child participate honestly with no tendencies toward cheating to win?
- Is this activity a stress reliever or a stress inducer?
- Is my child interested in competition – or am I?

St. John’s behavioral health psychologist Joyce Noble, Ph.D. suggests the following ways we can help our children deal with stress and competition:

- Listen to them. Encourage them to express their feelings even if you disagree.
- Allow them their feelings. Instead of saying, “Don’t feel sad about losing the game,” say, “I know you feel sad, but I’m proud that you tried.”
- Respect their privacy.
- Be observant.

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## Parent Tip Sheet *(cont.)*

- Encourage relaxation and exercise.
- Provide good nutrition, regular bedtimes and opportunities to talk.
- Show interest in what your child does at school.
- Praise effort even when accomplishments are small.
- Be in touch with teachers. Let them know if situations at home are causing stress.
- Don't put too much emphasis on grades.
- Set limits. Some experiences should still be "not for children."
- Share your values. Children need to know your values to guide them in forming their own.
- Put less emphasis on winning. Training and getting experience are worthwhile reasons for competing.

## RESOURCES

*Mercy St. John's Healthy People Magazine*

*"Competition: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly" by David W. Andrews, Ph.D.*

*USA Swimming*

*Christian Mommies*



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## Grades 3-5 Lesson Plan

### The Big Word

#### PROJECT AND PURPOSE

Students will artistically express their view of words and phrases related to competition and interpret each other's work.

#### OBJECTIVES

Students will ...

- Examine the personal meanings of assigned words/phrases.
- Illustrate a response using art supplies.
- Interpret the artist's view.

#### MATERIALS

- Black/white/smart board or overhead projector
- Large poster board
- Art supplies (markers, crayons, glue, magazines, colored paper, glitter, etc.)
- Pre-printed words and phrases, simple type face on plain white paper, letters five to 10 inches high

#### PROCEDURE

1. Before class, print the words and phrases you want the students to use in this activity. You may select from the following list or create your own:  
Scheduling    Winning    Losing    Effort    Teamwork    Pressure  
Doing Your Best    Hard Work    Perfection    Praise    Achievement
2. Begin the lesson by asking students to define the word "competition." Ask them to list the areas of their lives where they feel they are in competition and write their ideas on the board.
3. Ask: *What are some things that are good about competition? When is competition a bad thing?*
4. Break the class into groups of three to four students.
5. Explain: *Each group will be given a word or phrase related to competition – we'll call it your team's "Big Word." Your task is to illustrate the word, decorate it and embellish it so that the rest of us will know what your word means to your team. Each member of your team must contribute to the project and add his or her personal interpretation of the "Big Word." You may use any classroom art supplies plus any of your own. You will have the entire class period to complete the project, but it must be completed in class, not at home.*
6. When finished, place the "Big Words" around the room and ask OTHER students (those not in the group that created the selected "Big Word") to interpret each of the posters. Ask the class any of the following questions:
  - *How do the artists feel about their word? How do you know this?*
  - *Do they have personal experience? How can you tell?*
  - *How does this work fit into the concept of competition? Why?*
  - *Other than the word itself, what words come to your mind when you look at it?*
  - *Other than the word itself, what title would work for this piece? Why?*

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For the  
Classroom





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## Grades 3-5 Lesson Plan

### The Big Word *(cont.)*

7. Allow time for each of the groups to respond to the discussion points made by their classmates.
8. Have students write a journal entry or a personal response to their own words or one of their classmate's words, and then answer the following question: *Is competition a "Big Word" in your life?*

For the  
Classroom



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## Grades 6-8 Lesson Plan

### Team Assortment

#### PROJECT AND PURPOSE

Students will create a team identity for their “team” based on similarities within the group and members’ individual strengths.

#### OBJECTIVES

Students will ...

- Form teams based on random criteria.
- Determine their team’s identity based on similar and unique traits.
- Explain their choices.
- Draw conclusions about what creates competition.

#### MATERIALS

- Open room
- Art supplies (poster board, colored paper, markers, glue, etc.)

#### PROCEDURE

1. Move all desks and chairs to the perimeter of the room for a clear center space and have students leave their books, bags, etc. on the edges as well.
2. Explain: *Today is all about teambuilding. We will break into teams according to very specific criteria. I will announce the criterion and you will form your teams and find a space in the room for your team “home base.” As the group leader, I reserve the right to change the criterion at any point.*
3. Announce the first team creation criterion and watch as students form their groups. Try using the criterion of “Birth Month Teams.”
4. When students have arranged themselves, change the criterion and ask students to form new groups based on the new criterion. Ideas to choose from include: Color of clothing items; eye or hair color; favorite foods, music, television shows, etc.; car colors; creases on their pointer finger knuckle; middle initials; etc.
5. Observe each team breakdown. When you find that one of the criteria breaks the class into fairly even groups, stop OR return to that criterion.
6. Ask students: *How did you get in your current team? Did one person seem to organize the group? Did many people take on that task? Who felt tentative about joining a group? Why?*
7. Now that students are in their final team, announce: *These are your teams. You now have the following tasks:*
  - *Find one thing besides the criterion that your entire group has in common.*
  - *Make a list of the unique gifts/traits/skills/qualities of each member of your group.*
  - *Complete one of the following tasks that represents your team’s group and individual strengths:*
    - a. *Design a team flag or symbol*
    - b. *Create and illustrate a team motto*
    - c. *Write and perform a team poem, dance, rap, song or cheer*

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For the  
Classroom



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## Grades 6-8 Lesson Plan

### Team Assortment *(cont.)*

For the  
Classroom

8. Give teams at least the rest of the class to complete the tasks. When allotted time is up, gather them together to present their information and creations to the rest of the class.
9. After each team has presented, ask them to discuss what they discovered about their strengths as teams. Was it their group similarities or their unique differences that made them a strong team? Why?
10. Ask: *At any time, did you feel you were in competition with another team? WERE WE COMPETING? Was that ever the instruction? What does that tell you about how we feel about competition?*
11. Have students write a response to the day's activity and answer the question: *What makes us competitive?*



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## Grades 9-12 Lesson Plan

### That's All I Have To Say About That

#### PROJECT AND PURPOSE

Students play a game in randomly selected teams and then analyze quotations about competition and determine what role competition plays in their lives.

#### OBJECTIVES

Students will ...

- Play a game of "Cup."
- Read and apply selected quotations to their experiences.
- Decide how competition began in their lives and how it applies to them now.

#### MATERIALS

- Different colored sticker dots (four to six colors)
- Open space
- Styrofoam cups, enough for one per group
- *Competition Quotations* handout
- Paper and writing implements

#### PROCEDURE

1. As students enter the room, randomly assign them a colored sticker dot so that when students form groups based on the color of their dots, each group will contain between five and eight students. Do not explain the dot's purpose to any student.
2. When class has started, instruct students to find other classmates with the same color and to stand in a small circle as a color group.
3. Give each group one Styrofoam cup and explain: *You will be playing a game of "Cup." Your team must work together to keep the cup in the air by hitting it upwards. The rules are simple:*
  - *A person may only hit the cup two times in a row, but many times in a game.*
  - *Everyone in the group must hit the cup at least twice.*
  - *Every time the cup drops, a new person must start the game again.*
  - *The group must count the hits out loud in unison.*
4. Let teams practice a few rounds and then call, "Freeze!" Give all of the teams the number 32 and tell them to follow the rules of the game until they have hit the cup 32 times. Say: *As soon as you reach 32, you must all stop hitting the cup and step back away from it and let it hit the ground. You may try as many times as necessary to complete this task. If the cup hits the ground before you reach 32, you must start over. When your group finishes, you are to cheer on your classmates until each group has reached 32.*

*NOTE:* If reaching 32 comes quickly for all groups, increase the number and play again as time allows.

5. When each team has completed the game, have them sit down with their groups and ask: *While you were playing "Cup," what were you concentrating on? Did you watch the other groups or did you keep your focus on your group's cup? Why? Did you ever feel you were in a competition? Why or why not?*

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For the  
Classroom



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## Grades 9-12 Lesson Plan

### That's All I Have To Say About That *(cont.)*

For the  
Classroom

6. Hand out the *Competition Quotations* handout and instruct the groups: *Go around your circle and read each of the quotations out loud, one person at a time. Then, as a group, select the one quotation that seems to sum up your group's experience playing "Cup."* Allow about ten minutes for this part of the exercise.
7. Let the groups share their selections with the other groups.
8. Explain: "*Cup*" is a game designed for group cooperation, not competition. *Which do you enjoy more, competition or cooperation? Be ready to explain your answers.*
9. Ask students to read the final quotation on the page. *What is your personal response to this quotation?*
10. After the discussion, assign each student to write their thoughts on this topic and quotation.

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# Competition Quotations

Forget your opponents; always play against par.  
– *Sam Snead, golfer*

Do not hold the delusion that your advancement is accomplished by crushing others.  
– *Marcus Tullius Cicero, ancient philosopher*

All of us do not have equal talent, but all of us should have an equal opportunity to develop our talent.  
– *John F. Kennedy, president of the United States*

Trying to be number one and trying to do a task well are two different things.  
– *Alfie Kohn, author of “No Contest: The Case Against Competition”*

To free the mind from the habit of competition, we must see in detail the process by which the mind is ensnared by competition.  
– *Marguerite Beecher, psychologist and author*

[Competition] ... ensures the survival of the fittest in every department.  
– *Andrew Carnegie, U.S. industrialist and philanthropist*

Playing games with agreed upon rules helps children learn to live by rules, establish the delicate balance between competition and cooperation, between fair play and justice and exploitation and abuse of these for personal gain. It helps them learn to manage the warmth of winning and the hurt of losing; it helps them to believe that there will be another chance to win the next time.  
– *James P. Comer, U.S. psychiatrist and author*

We destroy the ... love of learning in children, which is so strong when they are small, by encouraging and compelling them to work for petty and contemptible rewards – gold stars, or papers marked 100 and tacked to the wall, or A's on report cards, or honor rolls, or dean's lists, or Phi Beta Kappa keys—in short, for the ignoble satisfaction of feeling that they are better than someone else.  
– *John Holt, author of “How Children Fail”*



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## Discussion Questions

**Students, educators and families can discuss competition after viewing the show. Use these questions as a guide.**

1. Where do you find competition in your everyday life?
2. Does competition have to be a scheduled event? Why or why not?
3. How do you react to competition? Do you enjoy it? Does it stress you out?
4. Do you feel pressured to compete? By whom? Yourself? Your parents? Your coaches? Your teachers? Your friends and/or peers? Society in general? Explain your answer.
5. Do you think the pressure to compete felt by the people in the video is realistic? Why or why not?  
Discuss each one of them:
  - Tessa Cooper (gymnast)
  - The Cooper family—brothers (Seth) and parents
  - Kelly Zalocusky
  - John Dohle
  - Megan EberhardCan you relate to any of their situations? How?
6. Do parents understand the pressure many teens feel from competition? Explain your answer.
7. How do you feel before a test? Do you feel you are competing with other students? Why or why not?
8. Do you participate on a team? If so, do your coaches make you feel like winning is the main goal, or that learning to play and improving your skills is the central focus of your team? Or is there another goal of the team? Explain your answer.
9. Which is better for a team, to build skills or to win games? Why?
10. If you do not participate in a sport, have you ever felt pressure to do so?
11. In what other organized activities do you participate? Are there competitive levels to that activity? Do you participate in those areas? Why or why not?
12. Is competition the main cause of stress for students today? Explain your answer.
13. How do you deal with stress and competition?
14. Do you think competition ends once you graduate from school? Why or why not?

## For more information



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on *Connect with Kids* or *Running Scared*,  
please call (888) 598-KIDS or  
email to [sales@cwknetwork.com](mailto:sales@cwknetwork.com)



# com·pe·ti·tion (kŏm pĭ tĭsh' ən)

What occurs between individuals or teams trying to be better or more successful than each other.



## Running Scared

Grades, standardized test scores, sports, awards, extracurricular activities – the competition kids face is endless and non-stop. What is at the root of this desire to excel and succeed? What are the effects of not winning? And can they be expected to handle this kind of competition at such a young age? *Running Scared* examines these questions and details the tremendous pressure many children are under to perform well and meet the expectations of others.

This special program was produced by the highly skilled television and education team at CWK Network, Inc.

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