



The Comparison Compass: A roadmap to navigate comparisons with your kid.



The road to navigating comparison always...

starts by...
grabbing your compass.

It feels pretty icky when your kid compares their life with someone else's, and your parenting doesn't quite size up. You become too strict, too tight, too mean, not fun enough.

Comparison is, at its core, the act of evaluating two or more things and then determining the similarities and difference of those things and to what degree¹.

As kids develop, they undergo complex changes to their sense of self and how they compare to others. However, the delivery of this comparison can often seem quite simple to us adults. For e.g. *At Tessa's house they eat dinner in front of the Telly, why do we have to sit at the table?*

In moments like these, kids are navigating how they think about themselves versus how others (their friends and parents) think about them.

Comparisons are a normal part of assessing whether we're on the right path as we're developing², but when our kids inadvertently question our sense of self as a parent (*am I too mean? am I doing the right thing?*), it's normal to feel a bit of a blow to our self-esteem.

Studies show a direct link between our child's desire for independence and autonomy and parents' feelings of self-worth³.

So, what do you do when you or your kid's comparison radar is triggered, and you're left trying to coax them into seeing some method in your apparently mad parenting?

STEP 1 Acknowledge their 'hardship'

Before driving your 'value case' home, it's important to create a safe space for your child to sit in their discomfort.

Remind yourself	To calm your farm and know your child is experiencing life 'outside'; it's normal (even a positive step) and there will be more to come!
Communicate	That their comparisons and complaints don't faze you.
Say things like	<i>uh-huh, yep, I know, I get it.</i>

STEP 2 Pause and listen intently to their 'sell'

The step of 'pausing' is essential and often overlooked in parent/child relationships.

Remind yourself	Pausing gives you power as a parent - to stay focused on what you want your kid to learn in that moment and the future.
Communicate	Calmness and little reaction at this point.
Do things like	Take a breath and notice your breath. Imagine you are a mountain and the brewing weather pattern (aka your child's display of unhappiness with you) does not affect you.

1. Comparison. Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation. (4 June 2022). <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison>
 2. Oosterwegel, A., & Oppenheimer, L. (1993). Development of the self-system: How children perceive their own and others' ideas about themselves. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 14(4), 443-460.
 3. Small, S. A. (1988). Parental self-esteem and its relationship to childrearing practices, parent-adolescent interaction, and adolescent behavior. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 1063-1072.



STEP 3 Instil the value

In this moment, you are reminding your child of the value system that your family unit has created, grown, and nurtured and it is now time to draw on that value.

Remind yourself	What you want your child to grow up valuing most.
Communicate	That you understand where they are coming from, but you are serious about your value and why it's important
Say things like	<i>I get it, but everyone has different ways, and in our family we (value system). Sorry, but it is the way it is, my love.</i>

STEP 4 Ride out the reaction while holding firm to the helm!

At this point, there very well could be a... 'reaction' via a little bit of carry-on. From their point of view, and level of development, they don't understand our point of view – they want something that looks more fun, or more exciting. That's pretty much it for them.

Remind yourself	They are learning, and they will learn over time. So, continue to do whatever it takes to hold firm, because holding firm reinforces that you are serious in what you are saying (and try not to get too offended).
Communicate	As above, aka, you are serious about this and why it's important.
Say things like	<i>I know, you like that way better, this is how our family is, believe me that it is important, I'm not wanting to hurt you, my job is to bring you up and this decision is a big part of that.</i>

STEP 5 Reinforce the value system

Remember that when your child is carrying on, they can't understand the complex and abstract 'behind the scenes' details of why you have the values you have. Plus, in the moment, it's not your objective for them to understand this yet. Reinforcing your value system is simply guiding them along the pathway to adjusting to the fact that their family has a pathway that is different from some others, or, sometimes, even a pathway at all!

Tweak it

No trip as a parent ever goes exactly according to plan and an important thing to remember when you're using the compass roadmap is that tweaking the timing and the delivery to suit the situation will be your special sauce. First, be aware of when you have been pulled back onto the bouncy castle of comparison. Listen to your body (angst, stress etc) as it will give you the clues you need to say, *ah-ha - I need to use that compass roadmap right now.* Then work out how to tweak your response and deliver it to your child. *Let's talk about why sitting at the dinner table is important to our family.* This often happens in a matter of minutes BUT if you have the foundational steps above in your mind, you'll have the confidence to know you're doing the right thing.

Playing the Long Game.

It's normal for kids to be more attracted to, what appear to them, a 'better' (aka different) way of doing things. When you're in or reflecting on these moments, remember that parenting is *playing the long game*. Your child will learn as they grow, and they will get it much more if we maintain a quiet confidence that they can handle it. Work out your 'non-negotiables' (what you aren't prepared to compromise on) and be prepared to allow some wiggle room as they grow up. Look out for opportunities to 'live' your value system and (subtly!) check in with e.g., how they feel about doing the things you are doing. Co-regulate their potential carry-on, maintain the course and above all remember - your compass will get you back on track (eventually!).

In summary...

Need more guidance or advice on co-regulation or other emotional and behavioural challenges with kids.

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