



PARENTING
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PROTECT CHILDREN FROM COMPETITION THIS TERM

When schools reopen, something else quietly returns with the children to the classroom. It does not appear on timetables and school circulars, yet it shapes how children see themselves, how they learn, and how confident they feel. It is comparison.

The first days of a new term are filled with reunions and stories. Children talk about where they went for the holidays, what they received, which schoolmate transferred, and who now wears a new uniform.

Parents exchange pleasantries at reporting day, sometimes laced with subtle pride or quiet anxiety. Teachers resume lessons, often unaware of the invisible emotional contest already underway among learners. Children will be comparing how their friends and their school performed in Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE).

SILENT COMPETITION CHILDREN CARRY
Comparison does not announce itself loudly. It creeps in through casual remarks, sideways glances and innocent questions. Who is in the "better" class this term? Who moved to a bigger school? Whose parents paid fees early? Who seems more confident, more prepared and more praised?

For many children, the new term begins not with curiosity about

IMPRESSIONS

Schools, too, sometimes reinforce comparison without realising it. Public ranking, constant emphasis on class position, and early labelling of 'weak' or 'strong' learners can create lasting impressions.

In some schools, they have streams according to children's academic performance.

The ones in streams labelled as for weak performers always feel less-value academically.

Once a child believes they belong at the bottom, effort feels pointless. Once another believes they must always be at the top, fear replaces joy.

learning, but with an unspoken ranking of self-worth.

A child who feels 'behind' at the beginning of the term may disengage long before the first test is given. Some are worried about the previous comments, and they are not sure how their peers or teachers will be commenting about them in this new term.

VULNERABILITY

Children are still forming their identity. They borrow cues from adults, peers and systems around them to understand their value. When achievement, appearance, or



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background becomes the dominant measure, children quickly learn to define themselves in relation to others rather than through their own growth. A child who feels less capable may withdraw or act out. Another who feels superior may fear losing their position. In both cases, learning becomes emotional rather than exploratory. This is where your words of encouragement will always be vital.

HOW PARENTS FUEL THE PROBLEM

Parents often contribute to this silent competition without intending to. A comment like, "Your cousin is doing very well in her school" or "That child is already reading ahead" may be meant as motivation, but to a child, it can sound like a judgment. Even praise can become harmful when it is comparative or the tone seems judgmental.

When children feel valued only when they outperform others, success becomes fragile and anxiety-driven.

They stop learning for understanding and start learning for approval.

FIRST WEEKS OF TERM MATTER SO MUCH

What makes comparison particularly damaging at the start of the term is that it sets the emotional tone for everything that follows. Children do not return to school on equal footing.

They come from different homes, experiences, and emotional states. Expecting uniform confidence and performance ignores the realities of childhood. Education should be a space where differences are recognised without being turned into disadvantages.

Reporting day offers parents a rare opportunity to shape the term positively. Instead of focusing only on grades and rankings, parents can ask about a child's adjustment, confidence, and learning habits.

Asking teachers how a child can be supported, rather than how they compare with others, sends a powerful

message. It tells the child that school is a partnership, not a performance arena.

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO

Teachers play a critical role in the early weeks of the term. Group learning, recognition of diverse strengths, and avoiding premature academic labelling can transform classroom culture.

Children learn best when they feel seen and valued, not measured against others. Teachers should have this at the back of their mind and help children to start with energy.

Comparison does not stop at the school gate. Social media, even among younger learners, amplifies curated success and unrealistic standards. Children absorb these messages quickly. Helping children develop emotional awareness and self-worth equips them to resist harmful comparison. Teaching them that growth looks different for everyone is not lowering standards; it is building resilience.

GROWTH OVER RANKING

As parents and educators, we must ask ourselves what kind of success we want for our children.

Is it the short-lived triumph of being ahead of others, or the lasting confidence of knowing who they are and what they can become?

A child whose worth is not tied to comparison is more likely to persevere, innovate, and contribute meaningfully to society.

HELPING CHILDREN

The start of a new school term is not just an academic reset; it is an emotional one.

If we allow silent competition to dominate, we risk undermining confidence and motivation.

But if we protect children from constant comparison, we create space for healthy learning and character formation.