

COUNSELING CORNER

Monthly School Newsletter from Lutheran Counseling Services

Car Conversations

In the car, classroom or dinner table, try some of these ideas to build respect in yourself, your family or your class.



◆ Listen to a piece of music with multiple instruments or sounds. Discuss how each instrument cooperates to create the song. Have your child/student share a favorite song and share one of yours.

◆ **Consider 1 Corinthians 1:10, and what it tells about cooperation:**

"I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought." How does this verse guide us to "work together" and point us toward the same goal?



Cooperation

This trait is clearly important to successful schools, families, workplaces and communities. How to build it is sometimes less clear. Consider the definition of cooperation, per Dictionary.com, of

"the process of working together to the same end."

We can further break down the work into its Latin roots: co, meaning **together**, and operari, meaning **to work**.

To begin to boost this trait, it is important to be very clear about the goal or end that a group is working toward. Variations in the vision can lead to confusion, frustration and conflict. When children are involved, it is important for them to understand the goal as clearly and simply as possible. Parents and teachers who are **clear, concise, consistent, and calm** in communicating with children are more apt to find those children cooperating in the family or classroom. Helping them invest in the end goal and find their own way to contribute to it (within set limits) can also help to boost cooperation. Older children and teens can be included in defining the goals and including elements of what is important to them.

Researchers (McNally, Brown & Jackson, 2012) have linked cooperation to more complex and bigger brains. Additionally, intelligence was found to increase over time through cooperation and teamwork. It seems that people are wired to work together, not only to survive, but to thrive, connect socially, and to create & innovate.

Other researchers (Balcooni, Crivelli & Vanutelli, 2017) demonstrated that cooperation was tied to more positive self-perception compared to competition. And they also



◆ Watch a sporting event with your family or class. Discuss examples of cooperation, and examples where cooperation was lacking. Discuss possible reasons why cooperation was strong, or needed some strengthening. If you were the coach, how would you guide the team? How can cooperation and competition be balanced?

◆ Talk to your child/student about a school group activity and how it went. Did the group have a clear goal? What made it go well or what could have been improved? How did your child/student feel as part of that group? Does your child/student typically do well or have trouble with cooperative activities? What could help make his/her contributions more successful?

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found that those who cooperated with others were able to think more clearly and quickly, connecting this to more brain activity in the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain that is responsible for planning, controlling behavior, and establishing positive feelings. As parents and teachers, finding ways to boost cooperation reaps many rewards.

As Thanksgiving approaches, this can be an excellent opportunity to demonstrate cooperation in preparation for a family meal. Different family members can work together to prepare different items for the meal. Once a goal is defined, it can be fun to allow each person to be a little creative with their own contribution to boost their investment and connection to the overall task. For example, as long as plates and utensils are on the table, allow kids to add other objects as decorations for the meal. Allow kids to choose how to complete a task, within kitchen safety guidelines.

Whether interacting with preschoolers or teenagers, remember that cooperation is a social task. Boosting the positive connections between people, and finding a ways to ensure that everyone's contributions will impact the end goal can help boost cooperation. Find ways to work together as a class or family this month and see the positive benefits!

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." -Helen Keller

Balconi, M., Crivelli, D. & Vanutelli, M. E. (2017) Why to cooperate is better than to compete: brain and personality components. *BMC Neuroscience*.

McNally, L, Brown, S. P., & Jackson, A. L.. (2012) **Cooperation and the evolution of intelligence**. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*.

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