

# My way or the highway?



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## *Working together*

You see a shadow in the water. Then a fin cutting through the waves. The theme song from *Jaws* runs through your head. While you probably want to stay out of a shark's mouth, one fish swims right in. Talk about a win-win situation. The cleaner fish gets food and is protected from predators; the shark stays parasite-free and gets nice pearly whites. **Win-win isn't competition or compromise. It's all of us getting what we want.** Life doesn't have to be a pie where if you get a piece, someone else goes hungry. Instead of your way or their way, be like the shark and cleaner fish ... find what works for everyone.

Competition isn't bad in all situations. What fun would sports, games, or even shopping be without some healthy competition? However, there are many situations where competition is used, even though cooperation would be more effective. Use these tips to help your teen(s) think win-win instead of win-lose.

- **Encourage cooperative actions.** Whether it's finishing chores, buying gifts, or doing homework, encourage your children to cooperate with their siblings instead of competing. If you only have one child, encourage him or her to cooperate with friends or extended family.
- **Support your teen's interest in teams or other groups.** Working together in a music group, on a sports team, or with a community club often involves the best of both competition and cooperation. These types of organizations can teach healthy competition with other teams/groups as well as important cooperation skills within the organization such as using everyone's individual skills, trusting each other, and compensating for each other's weaknesses.
- **Problem-solve together.** Model cooperation by asking your teen to help you solve problems, especially if the problems are between the two of you. Ask your child to explain his or her point of view and then explain yours. Brainstorm with your teen to find solutions that work for everyone. Write down all the solutions, and commit to trying some of them to see how they work.

*"Too often we give children answers to remember rather than problems to solve." –Roger Lewin*

