B2-C1 English Worksheet

Sore Losers: Competition, Anger and Learning to Lose

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Article

Competition can bring out the best in people, but it can also expose their less flattering habits. In a Guardian advice column published on 29 October, a reader describes her sister-in-law, a woman approaching 40 who cannot bear to lose at board games. Whatever the stakes, she is determined to come out on top. When a result goes against her, she may lash out, sweep pieces from the table or storm off. Although the reader otherwise gets on well with her relative, the outbursts leave her uneasy. She fears that the woman might react just as badly when a disagreement arises away from the games table.

The wider family tends to laugh off these episodes, hoping to smooth things over. What looks like harmless teasing may instead let the problem slide. The columnist, philosopher Eleanor Gordon-Smith, argues that a game does not give anyone a free pass to behave badly. By treating each outburst as a charming personality quirk, relatives may unintentionally reinforce an embarrassing pattern. The reader does not have to make a scene or confront the woman in the heat of the moment. Rather, she can stop joining in the laughter and allow her disapproval to show.

A more constructive response might be to bring up the issue privately, once emotions have settled down. This requires tact: the aim is not to humiliate someone, but to make clear that anger has consequences for other people. The column offers no quick fix or guarantee that the behaviour will change. Nevertheless, it raises a broader question about sportsmanship. Learning to take defeat in your stride may matter as much in everyday relationships as it does in a competitive match.

True/False

Decide if each statement is True (T) or False (F).

No.	Statement	T / F
1	The woman reacts angrily even when the competition is not serious.	
2	Her family usually responds by refusing to play games with her.	
3	The advice recommends challenging the woman publicly while she is upset.	
4	The columnist believes laughter can conceal how disruptive the behaviour is.	
5	The reader worries that the outbursts may reflect how her relative handles other disagreements.	
6	The columnist promises that one private conversation will solve the problem.	
7	Family members can express disapproval without joining in the jokes.	
8	The article argues that competitive activities excuse poor treatment of others.	

Phrase Match

Match each phrase (1-10) to the correct definition (A-J).

Phrases (1-10)	Definitions (A-J)
1. come out on top	A. introduce a subject for discussion
2. lash out	B. behave dramatically and draw unwanted attention
3. storm off	C. dismiss something as insignificant by joking about it
4. gets on well with	D. react aggressively when upset
5. laugh off	E. while emotions are strong
6. smooth things over	F. have a friendly relationship with someone
7. make a scene	G. accept losing calmly and move forward
8. in the heat of the moment	H. finish as the winner
9. bring up	I. reduce tension and make an awkward situation easier to manage
10. take defeat in your stride	J. leave suddenly in anger

Synonym Match

Match each word (1-10) to a synonym (A-J).

Words (1-10)	Synonyms (A-J)
1. uneasy	A. innocuous
2. disagreement	B. inadvertently
3. harmless	C. repercussions
4. reinforce	D. diplomacy
5. unintentionally	E. uncomfortable
6. confront	F. productive
7. tact	G. resolute
8. constructive	H. dispute
9. consequences	I. strengthen
10. determined	J. challenge

Use the New Language

Choose 5 words or phrases and write your own sentences.

No.	Your sentence
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

Discussion Questions

Student A	Student B
1. When did you last take defeat in your stride?	1. At what point does healthy ambition become destructive competitiveness?
2. Have you ever seen someone lash out after a disappointing result?	2. Should relatives challenge repeated outbursts instead of laughing them off?
3. Which games or sports bring out your competitive streak?	3. Can the way someone loses reveal how they handle other conflicts?
4. Have you ever deliberately let a child or friend win?	4. Is letting another person win ever justified to protect a relationship?
5. What unwritten rules do you follow when playing with friends?	5. What should coaches teach children about fairness and disappointment?
6. How do you react when an opponent celebrates too much?	6. Do winner-take-all rewards at work encourage unethical behaviour?
7. Is there a competition you still remember vividly, and why?	7. Does public criticism make sore losers reflect or become defensive?
8. Have you ever played differently to avoid upsetting a sore loser?	8. Is emotional self-control more valuable than talent in a team?

Answer Key

True/False
1=T, 2=F, 3=F, 4=T, 5=T, 6=F, 7=T, 8=F

Phrase Match
1=H, 2=D, 3=J, 4=F, 5=C, 6=I, 7=B, 8=E, 9=A, 10=G

Synonym Match
1=E, 2=H, 3=A, 4=I, 5=B, 6=J, 7=D, 8=F, 9=C, 10=G

Example Sentences With the Phrases

No.	Example sentence
1	The youngest player managed to come out on top in the final.
2	It is unfair to lash out at a teammate after a mistake.
3	He threatened to storm off when the referee made a decision.
4	She gets on well with everyone in her badminton club.
5	They tried to laugh off the defeat and enjoy the evening.
6	A sincere apology helped smooth things over after the match.
7	He promised not to make a scene if he lost again.
8	In the heat of the moment, I said something I regretted.
9	It is easier to bring up the issue when everybody is calm.
10	Good sportsmanship means learning to take defeat in your stride.