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## When Your Teen Doesn't Make the Team

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When your child experiences an upsetting event, like not making the cut for a high school sports team, he or she needs your simple compassion and understanding, not preaching, rationalization or a philosophical perspective. Instead of, "We all have disappointments in life," it's better to say something along the lines of, "That's really tough. You've worked so hard and you've got such great skills." And then keep commiserating while expressing interest in hearing all about what happened and how he's feeling.

Of course, being a teen, he may not want to talk about it with you right there and then, but if you let him know you understand what a let-down this is, he may eventually communicate more. If he isn't talking about it with someone - you, another family member or his friends - it is important to continue to show casual, mild concern over time (which may require you to avoid displaying your real reaction at having to witness your child's distress). It is also important to spend time with him and provide opportunities for him to express his feelings.

One college student, "Leah," told me how her best time in high school was making the varsity girls' tennis team as a freshman. It was highly unusual and prestigious for a freshman to be on varsity. Then, her worst time was not making the cut sophomore year. Suddenly she was separated from the friends she had made on the varsity team and all of their activities. Her self-esteem and confidence plummeted, and she was embarrassed over this self-perceived failure. Leah's parents and coach convinced her to give the junior varsity team a try so she could still play the sport she loved. Her initial feelings of rejection and

inadequacy gradually receded as she was elected co-captain of the team and won almost all of her matches. Leah formed many wonderful friendships that year, and she made the varsity team her junior year. At that point, Leah was so happy on the JV team that it wasn't a simple decision to move up to varsity, although she did.

Some students don't make the freshman team in their sport. Others who have made the team as a freshman aren't able to progress beyond that. Many sports in Lamorinda high schools are so competitive that even accomplished players don't make the cut.

Teens usually feel an intense loss at not being part of the sport they love and have trained for over many years. For many, their sport has become part of their identity - and teen years are very much about forming one's identity. Additionally, they suddenly feel excluded from their group of friends. They are forced to become outsiders who are not invited to participate in team practices and games, bus rides, and social events where much bonding occurs.

Another loss is the prestige that accompanies being part of a high school team. In many cases, teens' self-esteem is tied into their sport. Some feel that no one will know who they are if they are not on a team. At a time when it is so important to fit in and be part of a group, they are relegated to the sidelines, literally and figuratively.

All in all, it is important for your teen to realize that naturally he will have feelings of loss, rejection, isolation, low self-esteem and self-confidence, and maybe some depression. The antidote is to express these feelings and take positive action of some kind. This is not the time to crawl into an emotional cave and hibernate. The more pro-active he is, the more he will be able to rise to the challenge of a difficult time. For example, volunteering or trying out a new activity or sport can provide a positive diversion. Of course, as parents, this is what we all hope for our children: that they will learn how to manage inevitable adversity and will build more inner strength as they mature.

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