

Parenting *ideas*

INSIGHTS

Building parent-school partnerships

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Swap cards – craze or just plain crazy

Banning activities such as the use of swap cards robs kids of valuable learning opportunities, as well as the fun!

In a world where children's toys and playthings constantly become mechanised, digitalised or sanitised it's good to see some things haven't changed – the use of swap cards.

The allure of collecting and swapping cards with your friends at school is something many generations can remember. People of my vintage probably can recall collecting and swapping footy cards, celebrity cards and even cards with the favourite pop groups of the time. What swap cards were popular when you were at school?

There was nothing quite like the feeling of satisfaction which comes from collecting the full set. However getting the full set was an expensive exercise as it usually meant buying more of the products that they were packaged up with. Inevitably you'd have five or more of one card and plenty of holes in your collection. How frustrating was that?

But there was nothing as frustrating as almost having a full set and not being able to find anyone at school who was willing to swap with you at the going rate. So on went your negotiation hat as you'd try to outsmart a budding extortionist.

While the fun was in the collecting, the thrill was definitely in the chase.

Fortunately kids can still have the same fun as past generations, as well as the opportunity to learn the same lessons we had. Sometimes the best social lessons kids can learn come from the more dubious interactions they have during lunchtime and recess.

There can be problems

There is no doubt that the swap card craze can cause consternation for adults. Some children can and do take advantage of others in the hierarchical world of the playground. While the majority of interactions kids have with each other at school are positive, there are times when they can be negative, difficult and in extreme cases of a bullying nature.

Kids need the freedom to negotiate their own interactions so they can learn from those experiences both good and bad. The street smarts that children pick up from their free and unrestricted play can be a huge advantage when negotiating tough social situations in school and beyond.

But there are solutions

Teachers and parents need to coach kids in the skills and techniques that they need to negotiate the many situations they meet in the schoolyard. They also need to be cognisant of the fact that some children

may take advantage of others. Even so unpleasant experiences can provide great social lessons such as how to avoid the same situation next time, how to handle the disappointment of being taken advantage of and how to negotiate better outcomes.

Parents and teachers need to be aware of bullying behaviours, which by definition are repetitive, intentional behaviours by one or more children on another that robs that child of any power to change the situation. If swap cards are at the centre of bullying then act to protect kids. If not, then it may be best to coach kids to cope or to be smarter next time.

Banning activities such as the use of swap cards robs kids of valuable learning activities.

Similarly a parent who buys a full set of cards for a child robs him of the thrill of the chase, as well as the chance to practise persistence, be organised and negotiate well, which are still valuable skills to have at school and most workplaces as well.

Swap cards. So much fun and so much learning. How good is that!

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