

Competition

Dawn Davenport

I'm as competitive as the next person. Whether I'm playing dominoes or tennis or Trivial Pursuit, I like to win. I don't often, but I like to. Competition is a force for good: spurring us, challenging us, pushing us.

My eldest child wasn't much of a soccer player and neither was the team she played on throughout elementary school. The inaptly named "Red Hots" went two years without winning a single game. After the game, we always asked if she'd had fun, and when she replied yes, we said that's what it was all about. One Saturday morning they faced opponents wiped out by a too lenient sleep-over the night before, and lo and behold, the Red Hots lived up to their name. My daughter, who had never experienced the exhilaration of soccer triumph, summed up the sensation succinctly: "Hey, it's more fun to win!"

She's right, but not everything is a competition. From where I sit with one foot in the infertility world and one foot in the adoption world, I see way too much of it, and it drives me nuts. Competition has no place in how we choose to create our family.

Infertile and adopting couples get it from all sides. I probably hear it more because my work and the *Creating a Family* radio show cover the waterfront of all alternative methods of family building, but you don't have to scratch the surface of many internet forums or support group meetings to hear it for yourself. It may be subtle, but it's there all the same. People who adopt internationally hear "Why didn't you adopt children here in the US?" People who adopt infants domestically hear "Why didn't you adopt from foster care." People going through IVF, especially after the first failed round, hear "Why don't you just adopt." People moving to adoption after infertility hear "Why are you quitting, I know of someone who got pregnant on the _____ (third, fifth, tenth) IVF cycle." And heaven help the folks who choose to adopt without being infertile. They are almost past commenting, but they still hear plenty of "don't you want children of your own?"

Competition assumes that there is something to win-that one way is better. Oh, if only infertility and adoption were so clear. Here's what I know for sure: what's right for me may not be, and probably isn't, right for you. And what's right for you right now, may very likely change in the future. Although we share the pain of wanting children, everyone's journey is unique.

Many of these comments come from folks who have never needed an alternative way to form their families. They ditch the condoms, buy a bottle of wine, and nine months later welcome a child into their family. For these people, the issue isn't competition, just ignorance and insensitivity. Deal with them as you see fit.

But I want to address the green-eyed monster's presence within our community. The dirty laundry we wouldn't necessarily want to share with the rest of the world. People in infertility treatment may question how you can give up the biological connection. People who adopt may question why someone would continue with the uncertainty and expense of infertility treatments. People who adopt domestically may question why someone would adopt from abroad when there are kids right here at home that need families. People using their own eggs for IVF may question how someone could use donor eggs without exhausting all other options first. People who adopt children already born may question why someone would adopt an embryo.

I don't have a problem with real, honest to goodness questions. I'm all for increased dialog and understanding. But the intent of a real question is to receive information. Many of these so-called questions are veiled, or not so veiled, attempts to judge the other person's decision. These questions come with an inherent sense of the superiority of one method of family building.

Let's face it; most of us opt for the easiest way to have kids. For some, there is no easy way, but they choose the next step that feels most comfortable. Ease and comfort are individual and may change with time. We have no control over what others outside of the sisterhood and brotherhood of alternative family building say, but we can control what we say. Let's make a pact to celebrate all forms of family creation and drop the sense, at least outwardly, that one way is the best way. If we end up with the family we want, then we have won.



*Dawn Davenport is the host of the internet radio show, *Creating a Family: Talk about Infertility and Adoption*. (Check out the show topics at the radio page of www.CreatingaFamily.com) The *Creating a Family* website provides resources and education to those interested in infertility and adoption. She is an attorney, author (*The Complete Book of International Adoption* - Random House), and consultant for those weighing their infertility and adoption options. She's also a mom through birth and adoption.*