

Are Participation Trophies Good or Bad for Kids?

This week's DebateAble Table topic asks you, your family and friends to think about participation trophies and whether they're positive or negative-- or whether (like lots of other questions) it just depends on who you ask.

What is a participation trophy?

A trophy or other award given to everyone who takes part in an activity to recognize their participation, not to honor any specific accomplishment or ranking.

STOP! Before you go any further:

- Take a moment to *notice* your own opinion about participation trophies. Do you personally think they're a good thing or a bad thing? Why?
- Write your opinions on the back of this piece of paper so you can look back later to see whether any of them have changed based on what you learn from the activities or what you hear from others.

Participation trophies are good for kids. (AFFIRMATIVE)

One opinion: "Playing sports isn't just about being the best of the best. It's about learning the importance of an active lifestyle, developing social skills by befriending and working with other people, and learning a new, really fun game that could turn into a lifelong interest. Using participation trophies early on to give children a token of the good times and hard work they put into a season will only help drive those points home."

The Participation Trophy Debate: What Psychologists Say, K2awards.com

Rewarding kids for their efforts shows them the value of being present, working hard, and contributing to a team.

The Participation Trophy Debate: What Psychologists Say, K2awards.com

Kids know the difference between participation trophies and winner trophies, and they understand the value of each.

Dan Shanoff. In Defense Of Participation Trophies: Lighten Up, James Harrison, August 8, 2016, espn.com

Participation trophies show children that trying new things can teach them more than if they only do the things they think they will succeed at.

The Participation Trophy Debate: What Psychologists Say, K2awards.com

Participation trophies are not good for kids. (NEGATIVE)

One opinion: "The participation trophy is a symbol of What's Wrong With America: the disappearance of toughness, discipline, and accountability; the lack of will, determination, and hard work; the creation of coddled children who are taught that they are special, who never learn that you have to earn it, who are being set up for failure." ("Coddle" means to pamper or spoil, or treat someone with too much care)

STEFAN FATSIS. We've Been Handing Out Participation Trophies for 100 Years, April 10, 2019 Slate.com;

When kids are given participation trophies, they never get the chance to experience or learn from failure.

Participation Trophies - "Special" or "Harmful" characterandleadership.com

Kids who get participation trophies grow up feeling entitled to rewards for simply showing up.

The Participation Trophy Debate: What Psychologists Say, K2awards.com

Participation trophies can cause kids to not try as hard because they're taught to expect awards no matter what they do.

Zachary Manning. "Do participation trophies hurt our motivation?" Spartan Newsroom, March 21, 2017, news.jrn.msu.edu

Did you know (or do you care?) ...

In a 2015 survey of 1,000 Americans:

- 57% said that only winners of an activity should receive trophies,
- 40% said that every participant should receive trophies whether they win or lose.

Reason-Rupe national telephone poll, executed by Princeton Survey Research Associates International.

Questions to Consider: Participation Trophies

- Read the document, "Are Participation Trophies Good or Bad for Kids?"
- Answer each question below: write out your answers, or think about them without writing, or answer out loud.
- Ask one or more family member(s) to answer each question. Talk with them about their answers and how they're the same or different from yours. What can you learn from each other about your unique ideas?

(1) Name as many activities as you can where trophies or awards are given to winners OR all participants? Be specific.

(2) "Participation, competition, teamwork and enjoyment should be their *own* rewards for participating in an activity."

What do you think it means to say something should "be its own reward"? _____

Do you think the person who made this statement believes in giving participation trophies? YES NO

Do you agree or disagree with this statement? AGREE DISAGREE

Why? _____

(3) Do you think participation trophies hurt kids' motivation to improve? Why or why not? _____

(4) Is the solution to give participation trophies **and** winner trophies to kids at the same event? Why or why not?

(5) • Read the STUDY below and answer the questions that follow.

- Then, read the study out loud to one or two other people and have them answer the questions.
- Compare your answers.

Doctors at Stanford University did a study that included an experiment with 400 fifth grade students who were given an easy IQ test (a test designed to measure intelligence.) After the test, some students were praised for being smart and other students were praised for working hard. Next, the students were asked to take another test and were given a choice between one that would be easy for them to do well, or one that was hard but would improve their learning.

Mueller, C. M., & Dweck, C. S. (1998). Praise for intelligence can undermine children's motivation and performance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(1), 33-52. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.75.1.33>

Circle which test you think was chosen by most of the students **who were praised for being smart**?

Your answer: EASY HARD Other (1) answer: EASY HARD Other (2) answer: EASY HARD

Circle which test you think was chosen by most of the students **who were praised for working hard**?

Your answer: EASY HARD Other (1) answer: EASY HARD Other (2) answer: EASY HARD

Turn your paper upside down to find out the choices made by both sets of students in the box ↓

Most (67%) of the students who were praised for being smart chose the easy test.
Almost all (92%) of students who were praised for working hard chose the hard one.

What does this study have to do with arguments for or against participation trophies? _____

(6) Has your opinion about participation trophies changed since you started this activity? In what way? _____

STAKEHOLDERS

One of the ways to look at *any* debate topic is by thinking about who the stakeholders are.

What's a stakeholder?

A "stakeholder" is any person or group that has something to win or lose from the result of the argument. For example, for the topic "All kids should have smart phones," some of the stakeholders might be parents, schools, kids. Can you think of any other person or group of people who might be affected by either side of this argument?

STAKEHOLDER ACTIVITY

There are many different possible stakeholders in the arguments for and against participation trophies. Four of them are listed in the chart below and there is space for you to come up with three more if you can.

The rest of the activity can be played *with others* or *on your own*.

Play with others: Read the explanation of "stakeholders" in the box at the top of this page out loud.

Decide which stakeholder each person will pretend to be by letting everyone select or assigning roles.

Ask each stakeholder to come up with one thing their stakeholder wins and one thing their stakeholder loses on both sides of the topic:

- **Participation trophies should be given to everyone in a competition** ("PARTICIPATION TROPHY").
- **Participation trophies should not be given to anyone in a competition** ("NO PARTICIPATION TROPHY.")

Play on your own: Fill out as many different wins and losses as you can for the different stakeholders. See if you can complete the whole chart!

STAKEHOLDER CHART

STAKEHOLDER	PARTICIPATION TROPHY	NO PARTICIPATION TROPHY
Child (participant)	WIN:	WIN:
	LOSE:	LOSE:
Parent	WIN:	WIN:
	LOSE:	LOSE:
Coach	WIN:	WIN:
	LOSE:	LOSE:
Trophy Company	WIN:	WIN:
	LOSE:	LOSE:
_____ (stakeholder)	WIN:	WIN:
	LOSE:	LOSE:
_____ (stakeholder)	WIN:	WIN:
	LOSE:	LOSE:
_____ (stakeholder)	WIN:	WIN:
	LOSE:	LOSE: