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Making Character Development Fun



**Adult Guide**  
**The Worst Day Ever**

**Plot Summary**

Carlos, a big fan of the World Racing Organization (WRO), is excited about a contest being held at Speedy's Burgers and Ice Cream. Speedy's puts WRO racing cards in its kid's meals. Carlos has been trying to collect as many cards as he can, because the person with the winning card will get to meet Eddie Cruz, Carlos's favorite racecar driver. Thinking about the contest, Carlos rides his bike too fast and almost collides with a mail truck. This near-accident (along with a warning from Zaki, the "character chameleon") gets him to slow down and bike more carefully. But he still decides to sneak in a trip to Speedy's Burgers to get more racing cards before meeting his friends at the movies. This extra trip makes him late, so his friends go looking for him. By the time everyone has gathered back at the theater, the movie Carlos wanted to see—*Racecar Dreams*—is sold out. This puts Carlos in a bad mood. He then gets a lot more upset when he realizes that most of his racing cards fell out of his pocket on his way to the theater! Carlos has no time to look for the cards, because he, Jarrett, and Jake are playing an important soccer game right after the movie. Jessica, Shawnie, and Lauren go looking for Carlos's missing cards. Unfortunately, they only find a few of them. Meanwhile, at the soccer game, Carlos's bad mood only gets worse, and he really loses his cool. He blames his friends for his string of bad luck, and even throws a soccer ball at Jarrett. For this poor sportsmanship, Coach Murphy throws Carlos out of the game. When Carlos argues, the coach benches him for the next game, too. Guided by the kindly Mr. Lacey, Carlos finally calms down and apologizes to Jarrett. The next day, Carlos adopts a new, positive attitude and supports his team, making Zaki proud. When Jarrett gets hit by the soccer ball and breaks his nose, Carlos volunteers to ride with him in the ambulance. Despite the blood and the scary situation, Carlos not only keeps his cool, he also helps Jarrett stay calm so that he can be treated by the paramedic. The paramedic compliments "Calm Carlos," and everyone is impressed—including Coach Murphy, who decides to let Carlos play on the team again! The following day,

Carlos helps Middlebury win the soccer championship. In the end, Carlos loses the contest at Speedy's Burgers, but he gains something much more important: control over himself. He is proud to be "Calm Carlos," and Zaki and his friends in the Spruce Street Six are proud of him, too.

### **Moral Trials**

Throughout the story, Carlos struggles with keeping his cool. He gets impatient and frustrated at times, and whenever he loses control of himself, he behaves badly and makes poor decisions. When he shows self-discipline and has a good attitude, however, he does the right thing.

Early in the story, Carlos is careless and rides his bike too fast without watching where he is going. As a result, he almost gets in a bad accident. Zaki, who is riding with him, quickly reminds Carlos that self-discipline is important for safety.

Here is a set of questions you can ask your child about this part of the story:

*What do you think would have happened if Carlos had collided with the mail truck?*

*Do you sometimes get carried away and forget about safety?*

*How do you draw the line between having fun and being reckless?*

*What can you do to calm yourself when you start to get too excited, hyper, or out of control?*

After Carlos loses his racing cards, he gets so upset that he wants to abandon his soccer game to look for them. But Zaki asks him, "Are you thinking calmly? Are the cards more important than your teammates, who are depending on you?" Carlos then realizes that he cannot skip the soccer game and leave his friends in the lurch.

Here is a set of questions you can ask your child about this part of the story:

*How do you think Jarrett and Jake and the rest of the Middlebury soccer team would have felt if Carlos, their best goalie, had skipped the big game to look for his missing cards?*

*Have you ever been so focused on one thing that you forgot to do something or be there for your friends or family members? If so, how can you keep that from happening again?*

*What is the best way to handle a big disappointment (like the one Carlos experiences when he loses the racing cards he had been collecting for so long)?*

*How could you help a friend to get over a big disappointment?*

Next, Carlos's temper really boils over at his soccer game. He is so upset about losing his racing cards (and missing the movie) that he blames his friends and gets angry at his teammates. In fact, he gets so frustrated that he throws the soccer ball at Jarrett. For this, he is thrown out of the game. And when he argues with his coach, he is benched for the next game. Luckily, wise Mr. Lacey is there to help Carlos calm down and to convince him to apologize to Jarrett.

Here is a set of questions you can ask your child about this part of the story:

*What do you think would have happened if Carlos had not apologized to Jarrett? Do you think Jarrett and Jake would have stayed friends with him?*

*How can you get rid of your anger and frustration so that you can make good decisions?*

*Why is it important not to lose perspective? (If you do not know what it means to "lose perspective," ask an adult.)*

*Why is good sportsmanship important?*

In the final part of the story, Carlos gets control of his emotions and dramatically improves his attitude. He attends the soccer game, even though he cannot play, and cheers on his friends. Even more impressively, when Jarrett breaks his nose, Carlos supports him by traveling in the ambulance and keeping him calm. Carlos's new self-discipline even helps him handle losing the Speedy's Burgers contest, which used to matter so much to him. Now that he is "Calm Carlos," he has a new perspective and a lot of self-respect.

Here is a set of questions you can ask your child about this part of the story:

*Why was it important for Carlos to show up and cheer on his teammates when he was not allowed to play in the game?*

*If you were Carlos, would you have been tempted to try to get back in the game after Jarrett got hurt, rather than riding with him in the ambulance?*

*Why was it more important for Carlos to go with Jarrett?*

*Carlos was able to stay calm and help Jarrett by focusing on his friend instead of on himself. How can focusing on helping other people actually help you become a better person?*

*Why was Coach Murphy unsure at first about letting Carlos ride with Jarrett? Why did the coach let Carlos play with the team again after he helped Jarrett?*

*How did Zaki continue to help Carlos get control of himself? Do you have someone or something in your life that can help you the way Zaki helped Carlos?*

### **Concluding Reflection**

Carlos learned not to let his emotions dictate his actions. By staying calm, he was able to see more clearly what mattered to him the most. For example, he recognized that maintaining his friendships with the members of the Spruce Street Six was a lot more important to him than winning the Speedy's Burgers contest. He realized, too, that when he lost control, he did things he was ashamed of—things that had bad consequences for him and for others. But when he was calm and patient and even-tempered, he was a better friend, a better soccer player, and, best of all, a better person!

Here are some final questions to consider:

*Sometimes we all get in bad moods or let our tempers get the better of us. What changes can we make to become more even-tempered?*

*When Carlos lost his temper, his friends did not retaliate with the same bad behavior. And when Carlos apologized to Jarrett, Jarrett accepted his apology and forgave him. How else can friends and family members help one another become better people? How can they give one another strength and support to “stay cool,” even when facing disappointments and frustrations?*