



## 8.1 Children and Competition

Competition is a fact of life! There is a wide gap, however, between a healthy, nurturing competitive environment that is ideal for young children, and the aggression-based environment that is seen all too frequently in children's sport activities. Because there is a "right" approach and a "wrong" approach, every parent and coach must, at some time, reflect on the best way to introduce children to competition. Children's first experiences with competition will have a significant influence on their attitudes towards such activities, as well as on the sport or sports towards which they are attracted. Before signing up a child for a cross-country ski competition, take a close look at the following guidelines. They are designed to help a child get started the "right" way.

The time to teach youngsters important values such as the spirit of competition and how to cope with defeat is in the formative years. They need to be taught at an early age how to celebrate accomplishments even if they don't win the competition.

Ken Shields: former coach, Canadian Men's Basketball Team

### 8.1.1 The Benefits of Competition

In the hands of the right people, with the right attitudes, competition can be a positive, character-building experience. Competition provides one of the best opportunities for children to be exposed to rules and social values. It defines the need to get along well with others and be accepted as part of a team. It plays an important role in promoting values such as tolerance, fairness and responsibility.

Competitive sport helps participants to:

- Learn to work as part of a team.
- Learn to manage success and disappointment.
- Learn patience and perseverance.
- Learn responsibility and time management.
- Learn to manage stress.
- Learn to interact and relate with a variety of other people in a variety of situations; e.g., team mates on trips, officials at competitions, coaches and other competitors
- Learn to set and achieve goals.
- Learn respect for others.
- Gain physical fitness, develop body awareness.





- Gain confidence in their abilities and improve their self-esteem.

Children tend to be attracted naturally to competitive sport. From an early age they try to jump higher, throw farther or climb higher than their brothers or sisters. Competition is not a problem for young children. Problems only arise when someone else - usually a poorly informed coach or an overly enthusiastic parent - distorts competition by over-emphasizing the value of winning.

Children don't join a team to sit around and do nothing. Sport is not enjoyable if they don't get much opportunity to play. Studies have shown that children would rather play for a losing team than be a member of a winning team and sit on the sidelines. If they're not playing, they'll lose interest quickly.

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## 8.1.2 Getting Started the Right Way!

### FUNDamentals Stage of Development

The main emphasis should be fun and skill/speed development. Use unconventional race settings to optimize this development (e.g. obstacle courses, terrain parks, games). In this stage:

- Basic technical skills are a prerequisite.
- Encourage children to attend competitions as part of a club team.
- Ensure suitable ski equipment (boots, waxable skis, poles).
- Ensure the child is dressed appropriately for the weather, as well as the competition.
- Use varied terrain; include some unconventional settings (i.e. obstacle courses; terrain parks; skills races).
- Select events that recognize team effort and participation - not just winning.
- Select relays/races of different kinds, so that the winners are not always those that ski fastest.
- Downplay results; reward enthusiasm, improved skills, effort and respect for others.
- Four to six races a season; begin after four weeks on snow (after Christmas).
- Keep extended travel to a minimum; use local or neighboring club races of varied types (club fun races, relays, sprints, inter-school "fun" events and even regional or Provincial/Territorial Cup races *if* they are close to home, and *if* the skier has appropriate skills).
- Recommended distance races: 0.5 to 1.0 km (5 to 10 minutes); begin with shorter distances and increase over the ski season.





- Recommended sprint distances: 100 to 200 metres (skills race). Longer sprint races that fall outside the recommended race times may still be appropriate as long as those events are designed to emphasize skill development, thus reducing concerns about the use of inappropriate energy systems for the FUNdamentals stage of development. Typically, these events would be held on a ski playground sprint course that integrates several skill-challenging components that would disrupt the high racing tempo that is normally associated with sprint races. These are called “skills races”.
- Adapt race distances to race “time” guidelines for the stage of development.
- Select short races that encourage speed and good technique (not endurance).
- No racing if the temperature is -15 degrees Celsius or colder (plan alternative activities in case of cancellation).
- The club program for this age group should not focus on competitions. Competitions should be presented as just one more activity in a well-rounded ski program.
- All participants eight years of age and younger should receive a recognition award (such as a ribbon).

If young skiers require any assistance from their parents during a competition (from the time they enter the start enclosure until they leave the field of play after finishing the race), they are not ready to compete!

### 8.1.3 What Does Success Mean to a Child?

Children don't think like adults. They view success differently and these views differ with age, gender and the type of sport they play. British researcher Dr. Jean Whitehead asked 3,000 youngsters aged nine to 16 years to describe what success in sport means to them. She received these answers from primary school children.

- “I did my first back dive in front of my brother and my dad.”
- “I swam a length with nobody helping me.”
- “We were practising and I was the only one who could do it.”
- “I practised and practised, then one day I did it!”

These replies show that children don't see winning as the only kind of success. In fact, winning is most often cited last when children are asked about their reasons for participating.

In an article in *Coaching Children in Sport* entitled “Why Children Choose to Do Sport - or Stop”, author Whitehead writes: “Young children are more concerned with mastering their own environment and developing skills than beating others - at least until someone tells them that it is important to win.”





Up to about age ten, children believe that success is based upon effort and social approval. Because their capacity to assess their own ability develops more slowly, they cannot have clear expectations about how successful they will be in sport. They believe that those who try hard are successful, and if you are successful, you must have tried hard. Children in this age bracket tend to think of success as finishing the race, regardless of whether they placed first, second or 20th.

At about six to seven years of age, children start to compare their skills with those of other children. They start to wonder whether others can do the same things they can. Things that are those things that few others can do. It is not until about 12 years of age that children are able to tell the difference between skill, luck, effort and true athletic ability.

Because children are not good at judging their own ability, they depend on others to tell them how well they are doing in developing skills and how they compare to their peers. This places enormous responsibility on parents and coaches not to set standards that are too high.

The tendency to value winning above all else has been recognized as the cause of many problems in children's sport. When winning is kept in perspective, the focus becomes more appropriately placed on striving to win and the pursuit of victory. Successful coaches recognize that teaching children how to master new skills and strive for excellence will produce children who can compete against others and feel good about themselves.

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## 8.2 Parents Code of Conduct

- Keep in mind that children are involved in organized skiing for their enjoyment, not yours.
- Remember it is the children who are competing in an event, not you! The youngsters at the start line aren't you! If they make a mistake, it is *their* error; if they win an award, it is *their* achievement. Glory or grief, it is *their* competition.
- Encourage skill improvement, sportsmanship and an honest effort by recognizing achievements in these areas.
- Cheer *all* the competitors. Recognize and applaud a good effort when it is deserved. Be supportive and positive to *all* the children competing in the event. Praise the efforts of *all* the young skiers after a competition, especially if they did not do well. Be sincere!
- Encourage your child when he/she is competing, but be careful what you say. Yelling instructions can make children nervous. Shout only general encouragement or key words that have been previously discussed with the coach and your child.
- Teach your child that the rules of the competition are mutual agreements, which no one should evade or break. Encourage your child to respect the rules and the officials who make decisions on rulings.
- Never "pace" your child during a competition. It is against the rules! A child could be disqualified as a result of this type of infraction. Remain stationary and off the actual competitive course as your child skis past you.
- After the competition, give the child peace, quiet, dry warm clothes and perhaps a drink.
- Be supportive of the coach and help him/her when you can. Coaches give their time and resources to provide skill development and ski activities for your child.
- Be supportive of and thank organizers and officials. They are volunteering their free time to provide your child with an opportunity to participate in a competition. Encourage your child to say thank you to at least one official before they return home.
- Remember to keep competition in perspective. It isn't a World Cup, or an answer to world hunger, or the Olympics. *Let it just be fun!*





## 8.3 Competition Model for Cross-Country Skiing

Research in Canada shows that one of the largest contributing factors to children dropping out of sport is insufficient “game time”. For our sport, “game” translates into the testing of skills against peers in relays, races, treasure hunts, sprints, etc. with an emphasis on “team effort”. It isn’t enough to simply do practice sessions with drills; children need to be challenged.

Ski Cross Country

A well-balanced skill development program for children in the FUNdamentals stage of development would include approximately one hour of “**game-time**” for every three hours of skill instruction. Imagine soccer practices week after week without the participants playing a “game” at some point during the season! Imagine basketball practices where the participants learn basic skills week after week without ever playing a basketball game – not even a house-league game! Formal skill instruction sessions are not enough to keep a child involved in sport.

Children need to be challenged. They need an appropriate ratio of “game-time” versus formal skill instruction in order to test their skills against their peers and to motivate them to continue to improve those skills. As a result, FUNdamental competitive activities are an important component of a successful skill development program.

As a general principle, children should get their first exposure to competitive activities in the context of games during practice sessions, or in a special event specifically organized for their age group. When they learn the skills to manage one level/type of competitive activity, they are ready to graduate to the next one.

### 8.3.1 The Different Race Formats

There are five race formats currently used in cross-country ski competitions. Four of these formats have “mass start” components, which emphasize “head to head” competition, and which allow spectators to follow the story of the race as it unfolds:

- Interval Start.** A time-trial format in which competitors usually start 15 or 30 seconds behind one other and compete against the clock.
- Relay.** A traditional relay format with teams of three or four persons. The first skier from each team starts at the same time, and then hands off to the next skier at the end of the first leg. This continues until each member of the team has skied the prescribed course.
- Team Sprint.** A two-person sprint relay. The first skiers on each team race the course, then hand off to their team mates, who then ski the course. The second skiers then hand off to the first skiers who ski the course again. And so on. Each skier will complete three legs before the race is over.





- ❑ **Individual Sprint.** This event begins with a time trial to rank the skiers. Following that is a program similar to a “round-robin tournament”, in which the “heats” usually have four skiers each. The two fastest skiers from each heat move on to the next round.
- ❑ **Mass Start.** All skiers start the race at the same time.
- ❑ **Pursuit.** Two races in one. Skiers will ski one part of the race using classic technique, and the other part using skating technique – changing over mid-way. Several variations are used.

According to a USA Today / NBC telephone poll, almost three out of four children ages ten to 17 years said they wouldn't care if no score was kept during a game.

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### 8.3.2 An Appropriate Competitive Pathway

- ❑ **Games during Practice Sessions.** Falling tag, British Bulldog, etc. Refer to “*Practice Plans*” (section 5) and “*Games for Teaching Technique*” (section 4.3.9) for additional suggestions. Appropriate for children six years of age and older.

These activities are organized by the coaches leading the session.

- ❑ **Advanced Games.** Games organized for a specific age group – treasure hunt, relays using correct exchange procedures, etc. Appropriate for children six years of age and older depending on the skill level of the group. Ensure all participants are recognized.

These activities are usually organized by the coaches/parents involved with a particular group of children. If the club is large enough, there may be two or three groups of Level 1 skiers, Level 2 skiers, etc. The coaches/parents for each level can then join forces and share the work of coordinating the activity.

- ❑ **Racing Rocks! Activities** (Ski Tournament/Team Sprint/Double Cross). This type of event provides children with the opportunity to experience the fun and excitement of applying their cross-country ski skills in a variety of contexts - in an environment of adventure and intra-group competition - thereby providing a good introduction to organized competitive skiing. Refer to section 8.3.3 for details.

Racing Rocks! events are usually organized by the broader ski club. In this case the role of the coaches is to teach their group the skills that are required in order to have a positive experience.

- ❑ **Club Races.** Refer to the “*CCC Athlete Development Grid*” (section 2.4) and “*Getting Started the Right Way*” (section 8.1.2) for guidelines to help you select appropriate races for your skiers.
- ❑ **Regional Races.** Refer to the “*CCC Athlete Development Grid*” (section 2.4) and “*Getting Started the Right Way*” (section 8.1.2) for guidelines to help you select appropriate races for your skiers.







- ❑ **Provincial/Territorial Midget Championships.** A special competitive activity suitable for skiers in the Learning to Train stage of development. The objective of this event is to bring young skiers from a province or territory together for a weekend of cross-country ski competition and fun, encourage achievement through team effort and promote good ski technique.

### 8.3.3 Racing Rocks!

#### ❑ Ski Tournaments

A Ski Tournament is a one-day festival of special activities targeting the needs of children in the FUNdamentals and L2T stages of development. As a minimum, it would be expected to include an individual sprint race (Mad Dash), a terrain park relay and several other activities. These additional activities might include a treasure hunt, three-legged race, monster skis race, Beat the Field, on-snow orienteering contest, opening and closing ceremonies, and so on.

The Mad Dash (individual sprint race) for this age range begins with a draw to determine the start positions of the skiers. Following are the “elimination heats”, which should not have more than four skiers each. The two fastest skiers from each heat move forward to the next round. The remaining skiers in that heat may move to a consolation round at the discretion of the organizers.

A Terrain Park Relay has teams of three or four persons and follows the same basic rules that traditional relays do. The first skiers from each team start at the same time and then hand off to the next skier at the end of the first leg. This continues until each member of the team has completed the prescribed course.

Guidelines for organizing a tournament:

#### ✓ Promotion

- The tournament notice should include all the necessary information that the participants will require. It should be planned carefully, and there should be *no changes* after it is distributed. Set your registration deadline at least one or two days prior to the event so that you can make up teams as necessary and develop start lists. In the notice, include the start time, good directions to the location and the availability of a day lodge and/or washrooms. Don't forget to note any refreshments that will be provided and the accessibility (or not) of food and water, so that participants come prepared. Promote your event in local elementary schools and to other sport groups in your community. The intention is to encourage increased participation by those who are not members of ski clubs as well as those who are! The more kids you can get involved, the more fun they will have!

#### ✓ Formats/Techniques

- **Mad Dash:** Individual sprint; free technique; random draw. All skiers should be offered the opportunity to participate in a minimum of two heats. If participation numbers are small, categories can include skiers of different ages provided the recommended distances for those ages are the same. However, recognition awards should be provided for every year of birth and for both genders.







Mad Dash for children eight and under: the competition should be held on a short obstacle course with obstacles to go around, jump, side step, go backward, etc.

Mad Dash for children nine to 13: the sprint course should be well packed and fast so that the majority of the skiers can complete it in 20 seconds or less. The course should be on a slightly declining slope.

Distances (boys and girls):

8 & under 50-60 metres

9 - 12 100 metres

- **Terrain Park Relay:** classic technique; three or four person teams; mixed genders. A minimum of two age categories must be offered; more categories if participation numbers warrant it. Ideally the competition should be held in a terrain park setting with obstacles, uphill, downhill, jumps, hoops, etc., but a more traditional competition course will work as well with some adaptations.

Distances (boys and girls):

8 & under 4 x 0.5 km

9 - 12 4 x 1.0 km

Classic tracks must be set on the side of the course for free technique events as this is an entry level competition and some of the participants may not have the technique skills or the equipment for skating.

#### ✓ **Hosting Requirements**

- The stadium and trails need to be well packed, and prepared for both classic and skating techniques.
  - Organizers will need manual stopwatches, numbered bibs for every participant in the Mad Dash, relay bibs (made of durable paper) for the terrain park relay, clip boards, pencils and paper, course markers and an adequate number of race volunteers/officials to ensure the safety of the skiers.
  - A participant award should be provided to every child.
  - Prizes should be available for skiers with the best classic technique and the best skating technique – at least one for each male and female for each year of birth. Evaluation takes place throughout the day. A minimum of two NCCP Level 2 or higher coaches working as a team can be used as “judges” for selecting skiers for these awards.
  - Prizes should be awarded for the sprints, relays and other activities as well. These prizes can be as simple as a certificate or a candy. Be generous with the number of awards you give out.
  - Skiers may only enter in one age category for the duration of the event. When skiers initially register, they can enter in an older age category, but not a younger one.
- ✓ **Team Aggregate Award.** The following is an example of a team aggregate award. Each participating team accumulates points towards the Team Aggregate Trophy. Team points are earned as follows:





1	No. of participants in an individual start race	1 point per participant
2	No. of official teams in a relay event	6 points per team
3	No. of participants in a sprint race	1 point per participant
4	Top 4 placings in an individual start race ( <i>this is in addition to points earned for participation</i> )	5, 4, 3, 2 points
5	Top 4 placings in a sprint race ( <i>this is in addition to points earned for participation</i> )	5, 4, 3, 2 points
6	Top 4 team placings in an individual start race ( <i>based on total time of the best four times</i> )	5, 4, 3, 2 points
7	Top 4 team placings in a relay event	10, 8, 6, 4 points
8	Top 5 - best classic technique	5, 4, 3, 2, 1 points
9	Top 5 - best skating technique	5, 4, 3, 2, 1 points
10	Top 4 placings in other activities	5, 4, 3, 2 points

Points are calculated for official teams only. The team with the most overall points wins a Team Aggregate Trophy (be creative – the trophy could be made of popcorn!)

### ❑ Team Sprints

A Team Sprint is a two-person sprint relay. The first skiers on each team start together and race the course. They then hand off to their team mates, who also ski the course. The second skiers then hand off to the first skiers who ski the course again. The race is over when each skier has completed two legs.

Organizers need to decide in advance whether the race will be skating technique only, classic technique only, or a mix of the two.

If participation numbers are small, categories can include skiers of different ages provided the recommended distances for those ages are the same. However, recognition awards (ribbons, cookies, etc.) should be provided for every year of birth and for both genders.

A random draw, with normal relay start positions (#1 is in the centre track, # 2 to the right of #1, # 3 to the left of #1, etc.) should be used. The competition begins with a mass start. The number of teams that can start at one time will depend on the width and layout of the course. As a result, the largest number of teams that can be accommodated in a single category may not be more than five or six. The start should have parallel tracks (one for each team) that are straight for at least five metres. Starters may not change lanes until they have reached the end of their start lanes. The finish line must be wide enough for three skiers to finish simultaneously. The exchange zone should be situated after the finish line, and scaled





down in length to fit the distance of the race and the age and skill level of the participants. Some manner of ski preparation pits or stalls should be provided close to the exchange zone where the finishing skiers can wait for their next turn, and they and/or their coaches can work on their ski equipment, etc.

The competition courses can be the same ones used by the club for individual (heat) sprints, but the distances must be short because the skier will be skiing the course twice in a short period. A terrain park or ski playground could also be used as long as there is sufficient width.

Distances for each leg of the event (boys and girls):

8 & under	Not more than 50 meters
9 - 10	Not more than 75 meters
11 - 12	Not more than 100 meters

### ❑ Double Cross

Since the introduction of skating, higher technology equipment and new race formats such as sprinting, pursuits and mass starts, cross-country skiing has picked up speed and grown in excitement. At the leading edge of this trend is “Xtreme X-Country”, which at a basic level involves learning to ski through jumps, bumps and other features in a “terrain park”, or ski playground. Xtreme X-Country emphasizes basic athletic skills such as balance, agility, strength and the ability to adapt basic sport skills to an unusual setting.

Organizers need to decide in advance whether the race will be skating technique only, classic technique only, or if skiers can use either technique. Other decisions might include the use of poles – or not, mixed age categories, boy/girl teams, etc. Numbered race bibs are essential.

The competition course requires an elevated start, and should be designed so that the skiers can build up speed during the early stages of the race. The objective is to have a fast, roller-coaster course that demands fast turns, jumps and shifts in technique. The best venue to do this may be your club ski playground or terrain park. Keep in mind that the course must be suitable for the age and skill level of the participants and safety is always the first consideration.

MUSIC is an important component of this activity.

Following are four possibilities for a Double Cross format:

- ✓ **DC Option #1:** set up three stations and four groups/teams of skiers. Each station should have a different course with different challenges. The teams then rotate from station to station, using the break in between to get hot chocolate, etc. Each participant contributes to points for their team by completing the assigned course at each station. The team as a group earns points by their combined times at each station. The number of points they earn as a group depends on their ranking in comparison to the other teams. This option requires timing and a team aggregate winner.
- ✓ **DC Option #2:** set up as many as four “barrel racing” loops, depending on the number of participants. Each loop has two skiers competing against each other, going in opposite





directions around the course. The top skier from each round moves on to the next round. The bottom skier moves into a consolation round. No timing required.

- ✓ **DC Option #3:** set up one competition course that is wide enough for two to four skiers to compete at the same time. These skiers start at the same time and compete head-to-head. The top skier, or top two skiers from each wave move onto the next round. The bottom skier or bottom two skiers move into a consolation round. For a fast action event, the second wave of starters can begin before the first wave is finished, depending on the judgement of the starter. Note that the start line needs to be adjusted to take into account the advantage of being on the inside if the course turns to one side or the other soon after the start. No timing is required.
- ✓ **DC Option #4:** if the competition course in option #3 is one continuous loop (except for the elevated start for the initial skier), a Team Sprint format could be used in order to encourage team work among the skiers.

Distances (boys and girls):

8 & under	75 metres
9 - 12	100 metres

Race Support: Clubs will need manual stopwatches, numbered bibs for every race participant, course markers and an adequate number of race volunteers/officials to ensure the safety of the skiers.

### 8.3.4 Guidelines for Organizing Other Club Events/Special Activities

#### Establish Objectives

- To create a positive competitive experience?
- To challenge children to test their ski skills against those of their peers?
- To encourage good ski technique?
- To encourage achievement through team effort?
- To provide a tournament component (one group/club will end up the overall winner)?
- Other objectives?

#### Organizational Tips

- Keep it simple.
- Keep children moving and avoid lapses in the day's schedule of activities, but provide them with opportunities to rest and acquire refreshments also.
- Decide on "cut-off" temperatures and alternative dates in case of cancellation due to weather problems.





- ❑ Enlist parents to help you organize the event, and provide them with appropriate information to work with. Establish a (parent) organizing committee and divide up the tasks among them.
- ❑ Talk to others who have held similar events to find out what works well and what doesn't work well.
- ❑ Incorporate variety into your program. Relays and sprints are favorites. For all formats, keep the competition distances short. Remember to emphasize speed and good technique at this age, *not* endurance.
- ❑ Children enjoy relays, but the drawback to this activity is that participants are often left standing in the cold waiting for their team mates to complete their leg. To get the best out of this format, keep the distances short and do not have more than three or four members per team.
- ❑ Points towards the overall team/club award/trophy should recognize the efforts of as many participants as possible. Recognize team effort, good technique and participation - not just winning.





## 8.4 Competition and the Community Coach

### 8.4.1 Tasks of a Community Coach – Regional Races

Coaches working with children in the FUNdamental stage of development are often concerned that they don't have the background to teach this part of the program. They therefore coordinate with their club head coach and/or other club junior racing team leaders for assistance and support. If your club is just getting started, however, and there isn't an established junior racing program to work with, you and your group of skiers can always tackle this challenge yourselves, and if you do you will discover that it is a very rewarding experience.

#### Early planning considerations should include:

- finding out what competitions will be held in your region and what the formats and race distances will be;
- selecting events that are appropriate for the age and skill level of the children you are working with. Use the “*CCC Athlete Development Grid*” (section 2.4) as your guide;
- selecting events that will be held within a reasonable distance of your home community. Children in this age range should not be travelling long distances to a competition unless their families are making the trip for older siblings anyway; and
- coordinating the trip for your athletes as a group (the learning experience will be less intimidating if your young skiers are accompanied by team mates with technical skills similar to their own).

Children should learn specific skills before they participate in a ski competition, the same as they learn specific skills before they earn a technique award. Points to cover should include the following:

- dressing appropriately for a competition;
- the equipment they will need for a competition (no-wax skis are not appropriate);
- becoming familiar with the course and stadium area before the race; what to look for; how to stay on the right course during the competition; how to decide which ski techniques to use on different sections of the course, etc.;
- where to pick up their bibs;
- how to test that their skis are working, and what to do if they are not;
- an appropriate warm-up procedure;
- when is the best time to go to the start area (not too early; not too late);
- the basic rules that apply to the race format that has been selected;
- the race procedures they need to understand with respect to the format that has been





selected. For example, if an interval start race has been chosen, the child needs to know how a “count down” works, how to stand in the start gate and what it means to have the field start at 15 second intervals. If a relay has been selected, they need to know the start procedures for a relay, how to make a correct exchange in the exchange zone, etc.

- there are two kinds of races:
  - ✓ **classic technique:** where the competitor can ONLY use diagonal stride, one-step double poling, double poling, step turn and downhill techniques. In this type of race skiers ski in the tracks provided; and
  - ✓ **free technique:** where the competitor can also use skating techniques. In this case, the course is usually groomed for skating, and there may not be any tracks set in which to classic ski.
- the importance of maintaining good ski technique during the race;
- an appropriate warm down procedure; and
- how to interpret results in terms of improving a “personal best”. That means that each child should evaluate their performance against their own goals for the event (did they ski a difficult downhill turn without falling, did they use herringbone technique where they should have used offset technique, etc.) rather than comparing their finish times against those of the other children in the field.

### Coaching Tips:

- It is important to establish a minimum level of technical competency as a prerequisite for participation in a race.
- An established set of rules and regulations is used for all cross-country ski competitions in Canada.
- Coaches should, as a minimum, know the basic rules of their sport.
- The age categories at a cross-country ski competition should be the same as those used nationally for similar athlete development programs.
- Emphasize to parents that it is very important for their children to improve their performance through the development of good technique rather than endurance “training”.
- Traveling to a competition with their group or club “team” will be a highlight of the year for the young athletes in your program. It should be a rewarding “team building” exercise for your group as well as an opportunity for them to meet and mix with children their own age from other communities in the region.
- Trips should be coordinated to best utilize parental support.
  - ✓ Planning for the season should be done before the program starts up in the fall.
  - ✓ The responsibilities and expectations of the parents (with regard to supporting the program) should be made clear to them when they enroll their children.







- ✓ Tasks and responsibilities should be divided up early in the season. Consider individual situations while ensuring that a few parents aren't doing all the work. Some tasks do not require the parent to travel to a competition themselves.
- ✓ Special events/out of town competitions should be coordinated well in advance to allow parents to fit them into their schedules.
- ✓ If you plan ahead, you will get more support from the parents of your skiers.
- ❑ Create opportunities to teach sportsmanship, just as you would for teaching basic technique skills.
- ❑ If the temperature is colder than minus 15 degrees Celsius at race time, your athletes should miss this event.
- ❑ Teach your athletes to thank at least one official after the race is over.
- ❑ Provide your athletes with encouragement and positive feedback.
- ❑ Ask yourself these questions:
  - ✓ Did your team have fun?
  - ✓ Was it a positive experience for everyone?
  - ✓ Was I effective in saying something positive to each child before he/she left the event?

#### 8.4.2 The Basic Rules of a Cross-Country Ski Competition

1. The competitor is responsible for arriving at the start and starting at the correct time.
2. Competitors must follow the marked course from start to finish and must pass all controllers and behave in a fair manner towards other competitors. A competitor who deviates from the designated course must return to the point of deviation before continuing.
3. Competitors have to cover the whole distance on their skis, wearing their assigned bib with the competitor number visible at all times and using only their own means of propulsion. Help from pacemakers (parents or coaches) and pushing are not allowed.
4. A competitor calls "track" if they wish to pass another competitor. This applies to athletes of ALL ages.
5. A competitor who is overtaken by another competitor must give way on the first demand except in sprint competitions and in marked zones. This applies in classic technique events even when there are two tracks, and in free technique (skating) events when the skier being overtaken may have to restrict their skating action. When overtaking, competitors must not obstruct each other.
6. Once the competitors enter a zone where corridors are marked they must remain in their chosen corridor unless they are overtaking another competitor.
7. The competitors must comply with the instructions of competition officials.





8. Any competitor withdrawing from the competition due to an accident or for any other reason must be reported to the officials at the Finish Line, and the bib returned.
9. Coaches and others are not allowed to run more than 30 meters beside the competitors.
10. A relay exchange is achieved by the arriving skier when they tap their hand on any part of their team mate's body, while both are in the relay exchange zone.
11. If an exchange contravenes the rules, both competitors must be recalled to the relay exchange zone where a correct handover must take place before the next competitor taking over can start.
12. The jury ensures that rules are enforced. They have the right to disqualify a competitor who has been found to have broken the rules





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