



ASPEN

VALLEY SKI & SNOWBOARD CLUB

Parent Handbook

2020/2021

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Dear AVSC Nordic Parents,

Welcome to the 2020-2021 season!

What a long and strange year it has been. It seems like just yesterday that we were racing home from California to end our season early, yet when I think back to the amount of work and training these athletes have put in since then, it seems like years. Like many of you, we have been trying to adjust to the new schedules, guidelines and social normalcies. Our athletes have been showing a tremendous amount of flexibility and adaptability. As we look forward to the next year with caution and an equal amount of optimism, we are going to need to rely on that same level of flexibility and adaptability. Obviously, we do not know what is going to happen with COVID, the school schedules or the race calendar. But we do know that we can go outside, have fun and slide on snow in a safe way, if we practice some pretty simple guidelines. We also know that the plan is just that: a plan – and it is likely to change. We will do our absolute best to communicate with each of you, and only ask that you recognize we are trying our hardest.

It is an honor and privilege to be entrusted with the opportunity to coach your child and the rest of the skiers of the Roaring Fork Valley. We are committed to doing all that we can to help your child reach his or her full potential, both on and off the trails. We will be focused on instilling a love for skiing and an appreciation of, and adherence to, our core values: Commitment, Teamwork and Integrity. In our experience here at AVSC, it is through these values that your child cannot only best realize their athletic potential, but also develop character traits that will serve them throughout their lives. Each of our programs are built around these principles and designed with the best interests of your child in mind, in terms of their health, well-being, and future as an athlete and a person. Within that structure, you, the parents, will play a crucial role in your child's success with AVSC. We can only accomplish our goals if we have your help. With that in mind, we've compiled this parent handbook with everything you need to know about the program.

Everything we do here at AVSC is dynamic because we are always trying to learn and improve. We welcome your feedback about this process at any time.

Additionally, happy families are our best advertising. If you know of anyone who may wish to join the team, please be encouraging and have them contact anyone on our staff, or they can reach out to me directly, at 970-920-5140. Thanks in advance!

The AVSC Nordic program's main focus will always be on the best interests of our student-athletes and fostering a love for cross country skiing. Our goal is to create healthy athletes who always put forth their best attitude and effort, live each day with intention, and strive for personal excellence.

Nordic program success can be measured by athlete participation at all levels, athlete community involvement, alumni community involvement, results, representation at major championship events (Junior Nationals, Scando Cups, and World Juniors), and placement of athletes onto College teams, post-grad teams, and/or the USST.

AVSC Nordic Program Overview

AVSC's Nordic Programs are designed for children to progress in ability and commitment from our Bill Koch programs through the Team programs. Follow the flow chart to the right to follow your young athlete's path through the AVSC Nordic Development Pathway. Age groups are defined by your child's age on December 31st, 2020.

| US SKI AND SNOWBOARD Nordic Training Systems | AVSC Nordic Athlete Development Pipeline |
|--|---|
| Phase 6 Age Female 16+, Male 17+ 10+ yrs. in sport Ski/ Train 6 Days a Week Competition Period: Nov-April Number of Race Starts: 20-40 Annual Training Volume: 16-17: 450-500 , 18-19: 550-600, 20-21: 650-700, 22+: 700 | National Comp <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ages U-16+ • 6-11 years in sport • Individualized year-round training • 6 days per week on snow • 20-30 events per season • Full Domestic Schedule (RMN, JSuper Tours, Junior and Senior Nationals) • On-snow training emphasizes technique, tactics, strategy, mental readiness, and structured goal setting. |
| Phase 5 Age: Girls 12-16, Boys 14-17 6-11 years in Sport Train 5-6 days a week (6-10 sessions) Competitive Period: Nov/Dec-April Number of Race Starts 20-30 Play Complementary Sports that do not impede year round training Annual Training Volume: At least 500 hours by age 17 | High School <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ages 13+ (must be in High School) • 0-8 years in sport • Dryland training 2-4 per week starting at Thanksgiving • 4 days per week on snow • Compete for skill acquisition • 6-12 events per season • CHSAA and Local racing |
| Phase 4 Age: Girls 11-14+ , Boys 12-15 5-9 years in Sport Train 4-6 days a week Emphasize fun training Competitive Period: Dec-April Number of Race Starts 10-20 Play Complementary Sports Annual Training Volume: 250-450 | DEVO <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ages 10-13 • 1-7 years in sport • Dryland training 2 per week starting in Summer • Dryland training 3 per week starting in November • 3 days per week on snow / 60+ days on snow • Compete for skill development and fun • CHSAA and RMN Series and Local events • |
| Phase 3 Age: Girls 10-13 , Boys 11-14 4-8 years in Sport Train 4-6 days a week Emphasize outdoor recreation Introduce Fun Competitive Period: Jan-April Number of Race Starts 5-15 Play Complementary Sports | Bill Koch 2 Day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ages 8-11 • 1-4 years in sport • Two Days Per Week / 30 days on snow • Emphasizes on developing basic motor skills, though a variety of fun games and activities. • As children progress through the Bill Koch programs they will learn teamwork, fair play, and other essential habits common among successful adolescents. |
| Phase 2 Age: 6-10 years old 1-4 years in Sport Ski 2-6 days a week Emphasize outdoor recreation IFun Races Play Many other Sports | Bill Koch 1 day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ages 5-9 • 1-4 years in sport • One day per week / 15 days on snow • No dryland training (unless there is no snow when season starts) • Lean to ski program with focus is on developing a love for the sport and enjoying winter • Thanksgiving through mid March |
| Phase 1 Age: 2-6 years old 1-4 years in Sport Ski 1-3 days a week Emphasize outdoor recreation Participate in all sports, including balanced-based sport like gymnastics | |

2020-2021 Age Groups and Program Recommendations

The United States Ski & Snowboard Association (USSA) is the governing body for our sport. Their website is www.ussa.org. For the sake of consistency, all AVSC programs use the USSA Age Group system, where a child's age group is determined by his or her age on December 31st of that year. Children bump up an age group every 2 years and this happens on his or her even birth year (U8, U10, U12, etc.). A child's age group does not become important until they reach our Team Programs. We will never be picky about specific age group cut-offs in the Bill Koch Programs.

AVSC's Nordic Programs are designed for children to progress in ability and commitment from our Bill Koch (BK) programs through the high school Team/Programs (see development pipeline flow chart on page 5). Coaching staff recommendations based on age and ability are listed below. There is some purposeful age overlap built into program descriptions for parent discretion. Parents are encouraged to discuss their child's preferences with a coach.

| <u>Age Group</u> | <u>Birth Year</u> | <u>Ability</u> | <u>Program Recommendation</u> |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| U8 | 2013 and 2014 | All | One Day BK Program |
| U10 | 2011 and 2012 | Beginner | One or Two-day BK Program |
| U10 | 2011 and 2012 | Advanced | Two-day BK Program |
| U12 | 2009 and 2010 | Beginner | Two-day BK Program or Devo Team |
| U12 | 2009 and 2010 | Advanced | Devo Team |
| U14 | 2007 and 2008 | All | Devo Team |
| U16 | 2005 and 2006 | Beginner | High School Program (if 9 th grade) or Devo Team (if 8 th grade) |
| U16 | 2005 and 2006 | Advanced | High School Program <u>or</u> National Comp Team |
| U18 & U20 | 2001 to 2004 | Beginner | High School Program |
| U18 & U20 | 2001 to 2004 | Advanced | High School Program or National Comp Team |

At the Bill Koch and Devo levels, racing is not required. For Bill Koch participants who express interest, there are age appropriate events and races. At the Comp level, we become a racing team. Although we have no ability requirements and beginners are welcome, participants are expected to compete in races, set goals, and strive for personal improvement.

For a complete description of each program, use the programs tab on the AVSC Website under Winter Programs/Nordic. Click Programs, then choose Aspen Programs or Spring Gulch Programs. Here you can view program descriptions, days of the week, practice times, gear requirements, and program specific coaching staff (See the 'Website Familiarization' section of this handbook to acquaint yourself with the Website).

USSA CROSS COUNTRY TRAINING SYSTEM

USSA has outlined the following age classifications and Training System for Nordic skiing (p. 6). AVSC designs programs based on ideas from the Cross Country Training System. Our coaches are trained using USSA's Coaching Certification process. This graphic can be found on the next page AND on our website as well under the "About" tab.



Cross Country Training System

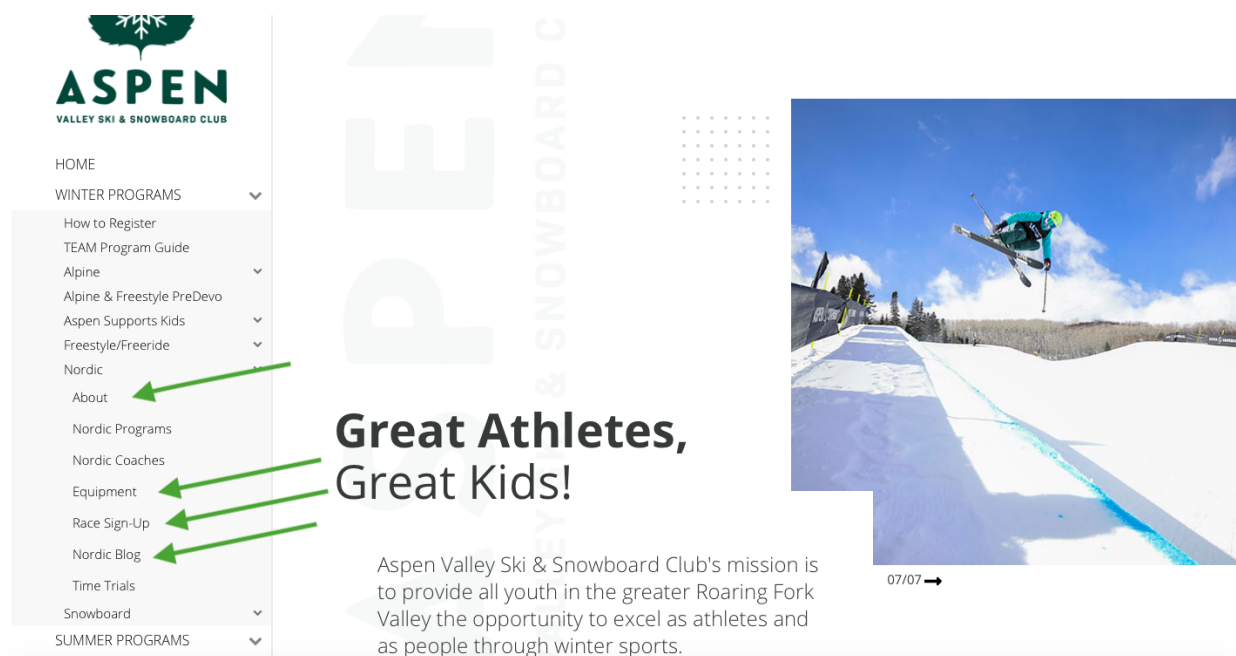
| Foundation Stage | | Pre and Post Puberty | | | Full Maturation |
|---|--|---|--|--|--|
| PHASE 1 | PHASE 2 | PHASE 3 | PHASE 4 | PHASE 5 | PHASE 6 |
| Biological Age Pre Puberty Age 2-6 years old Play Age 1-4 years in sport Participation Ski around 1-3 days a week, or as much as is enjoyable Emphasize outdoor recreation Parents encourage play versus training Participate in all sports, including balanced-based sports like gymnastics Sensitivity Windows Basic motor skills, balance, coordination | Biological Age Pre Puberty Age 6-10 years old Training Age 1-4 years in sport Participation Ski 2-6 days per week, or as much as is enjoyable Emphasize outdoor recreation Parents emphasize activity versus training Fun races Play many other sports Sensitivity Windows Males: Suppleness, Speed #1, Beginning of Skills Females: Suppleness, Speed #1, Skills | Biological Age Pre Puberty (Before Growth Spurt) Age Girls: 10-13: (J4-J3) Boys: 11-14: (J4-J2) Training Age 4-8 years in sport Participation Ski 4-6 days per week Emphasize outdoor recreation Introduce fun competition period: Jan.-April Number of race starts: 5-15 Play many complementary sports Sensitivity Windows Males: Skills, Stamina, Speed #2 Females: Skills, Stamina, Speed #2, Strength | Biological Age Puberty (Growth Spurt) Age Girls: 11-14+: (J4-J2+) Boys: 12-15: (J4-J2) Training Age Train 4-6 days, 5-9 years in sport Participation Emphasize fun training Competition Period: Dec.-April Number of race starts: 10-20 Play complementary sports Annual Training Volume: J4: Emphasize daily skiing, J3: 250-350, J2: 350-450+ Sensitivity Windows Males: Stamina, Speed #2 Females: Stamina, Speed #2, Strength | Biological Age Post Puberty (After Growth Spurt) Age Girls: 12-16: (J4-J1) Boys: 14-17: (J2-J1) Training Age 6-11 years in sport Participation Train 5-6 days, 6-10 sessions / week Competition Period: Nov/Dec-April Number of race starts: 20-30 Play complementary sports that do not impede year-round training Annual Training Volume: At least 600 hours by age 17 Sensitivity Windows Males: Stamina, Speed #2 Females: Stamina, Speed #2, | Biological Age Full Maturation Age Female: 16+ J1+ Male: 17+ J1+ Training Age Minimum 10+ years in sport Participation Ski / Train 6 days a week Competition Period: Nov.-April Number of race starts: 20-40 Annual Training Volume: 16-17: 450-500+, 18-19: 550-600+, 20-21: 650-700+, 22+: 700+ Sensitivity Window Males: Strength Females: End of Strength |

WEBSITE FAMILIARIZATION

Please visit the link below for Nordic updates and information throughout the year.

<http://www.teamavsc.org/>

On the AVSC Webpage, you will find all sorts of important Nordic specific resources. Please take some time to familiarize yourself with this website.



Use the Blog tab to read about any new updates, Nordic program wide info, see photos of practices and keep up with what your kids are doing. You will also receive weekly updates through Campminder. Please visit this site regularly so you don't miss out on info!

The **Equipment** tab can be very useful for new families to AVSC. Here you will find info regarding our gear requirements, season rentals, uniforms and our big ski swap and gear fitting night in September.

On the **Calendar** tab, you can download a version of our current race calendar and view other program schedules or subscribe to the Nordic Google Calendar that relates to your child. Everything Nordic is listed here. If you print a calendar for your refrigerator, remember to check back often with the blog as things can change and we will do our best to keep this updated.

The **About** tab contains the Parent Handbook (this document). It is also used for parent meeting content and race waivers that need a parent signature. There may be additional handouts stuck here from time to time, but you will usually be alerted to look here when needed.

The **Race Sign-Up** Tab is a very important one. This is how we know if your son or daughter will be attending an event with us. Please thoroughly read the "Signing up for a Race and Planning your Winter" section of this manual (p. 10) for a full description of how to use the Race Sign-Up tab. All athletes must RSVP on or before the sign-up due date prior to the race (using the Race Sign-Up form) to be included in our travel numbers.

WHO TRAVELS?

DEVO TEAM

Racing is completely optional for Devo Team Athletes. At this age, let your children decide if they want to race! This year is going to be a little different than it has been in the past. Travel will be as a family, and coaches will be at the venue to support athletes during the event, but there will not be any team travel/lodging at races. We will provide a suggested lodging option or two. This year there will be two Devo specific weekends of racing: one in Crested Butte and one in Steamboat (see schedule for more information.) In addition, we will utilize our RMN JNQ race for the U-14s and the local Ute series for fun low-key race opportunities without needing to leave the valley.

HIGH SCHOOL TEAM

The High School Team athletes are expected to participate in ALL the CHSAA races unless they have a pre-arranged excuse, illness, or injury. We will follow local school districts' travel guidelines for this group of athletes.

NATIONAL COMP TEAM

National Comp Team Program athletes are expected to participate in ALL the RMN Junior National Qualifier races unless they have a pre-arranged excuse, illness, or injury. There are usually several overnight trips for this group. National Comp Team Program athletes are encouraged to participate in some of the CHSAA races. This year is going to be a little different than it has been in the past. Travel will be as a family, and coaches will be at the venue to support athletes during the event, but we do not expect there be any team travel/lodging at races. We will provide a suggested lodging option or two in the race information sheets/sign ups.

SIGNING UP FOR A RACE & PLANNING YOUR WINTER

Steps to Sign Up for a Race:

Each race will have its own sign-up. Please make sure you read your Nordic team emails to keep track of race sign-up information.

Step 1: Each parent or athlete must go to www.teamavsc.org and click on the “Programs” tab. Scroll down to Nordic and click on the “Race Sign-Up” tab. Here you will find the necessary race sign up form. Direct link [click here](#)

Step 2: Choose the link for the race you are signing up for, and fill out the information needed.

***If you do not have a FIS number Don't Worry, this is not required. ***

Step 3: Hit submit

Step 4: You will be notified when a race sign-up is available. Feel free to visit www.teamavsc.org periodically for updates and new sign-ups.

IMPORTANT: Each individual race RSVP will be due according the sign-up deadline before that race. At that time, travel numbers will be considered final and travel arrangements, lodging and food plans will be finalized based on these numbers. If you RSVP that you will be traveling/racing and you cancel after the due date before an event, your account will be charged for all expenses that are nonrefundable in order to avoid a big price hike for the athletes attending. If you do not RSVP for a race/trip before the sign-up due date prior to the event, we may not have room for you, and you may have to stay home.

RACE INFO & BILLING

Travel expenses to and from RMN races are not covered in your program fees. We will always try to make team travel as affordable as possible (please sign up to attend a race well in advance to ensure this is possible).

All race travel communication will come from your program head coach as soon as it is ready. It is important to note that the Nordic Director is making the travel arrangements, NOT your head coach. Info will be passed along to all programs as soon as possible, but please be patient. You can expect to have travel information in your hands prior to a travel weekend.

This year parents and athletes looking to travel to a race will need to make their own lodging/meal arrangements. August will be sure to let you know where he suggests staying, but you're welcome to stay wherever works for your family.

The typical schedule for how you will receive race travel info is below:

- 1.) Prior to a race weekend, you will receive an e-mail from your program head coach letting you know what race is coming up, some general details about the event, and reminding you of the sign-up deadline.
- 2.) ALL RACE SIGN UPS ARE DUE ACCORDING TO INDIVIDUAL RACE DEADLINES.
- 3.) On Monday night, you will receive an updated list of registered athletes and more specific details about our arrangements, start times, etc.
 - a. You will also have the option to opt into a WhatsApp Group for the Weekend's Text Message Updates.
- 4.) Your bill for each weekend will be submitted before the end of the week after the race. Please allow the office another week to process and distribute invoices (2-3 weeks total). Let us know if you have any questions about your bill. Bills will typically include race entry fees, trail passes (if needed), coaches' transportation/lodging/food, a small wax fee (depending on what we used), and a coach fee. All coach payroll is covered by your program fees, **but athletes split the cost of coach expenses on trips.**
 - a. We will ALWAYS do our best to make race travel as affordable as possible! If you are signed up for a race and cancel after the Sunday prior, you will be responsible for all expenses that are nonrefundable, in order to avoid inflating the price for athletes attending. This includes race entries, travel expenses, and coach fees.

PARENT VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES & WORK DEPOSITS

It takes a village to raise a skier or a ski club. We could not operate without tons of support in the form of volunteer hours from our families and friends. We NEED your help!

Most of our team programs (National Comp, High School & Devo) have a parent work deposit amount associated with the program. As you complete and track volunteer hours you can earn money back. You may volunteer for any part of the club, not just the Nordic team (though we have plenty of Nordic opportunities and this can be a great way to meet other families and strengthen our Nordic community). Elsese Denis, our AVSC Director of Events, often sends out emails with club wide volunteer opportunities.

HERE IS AN EXAMPLE:

The DEVO Program in Aspen has a \$225 parent work deposit, which you pay when you register. Up to 100% of the parent work deposit is refundable at a rate of \$15/hour.

The parent work deposit is now all online with hours tracked though the signup program. In April AVSC's Administrative Manager, Stephanie Braudis (sbraudis@teamavsc.org) will send out an email with your total hours. Checks will be sent out prior to July 30th, 2021.

Parent Work Deposit Refunds cannot be rolled over to the following year. Two family households splitting work deposit fees will only be refunded their portion of the deposit according to the hours worked. If you did not pay a work deposit you won't receive credit. You can't earn more then you paid for the parent work deposit. Refunds are only eligible for 100% of amount paid.

NORDIC'S BIG VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES:

Mark your calendars – we need help with the following events! Stay tuned for more opportunities including our HS races to help and more information.

- **February 4th and 5th, 2021:** Raoul Willie Home Race
- **February 7nd, 2021:** Ski for Sisu
- **February 13st, 2021** AVSC Bonfire Dinner Fundraiser
- **END of year:** Bib ordering, mending, and washing

GOLDEN RULES

Here are our overarching guidelines that will help immensely:

- Let's appreciate that we're all trying our best.
- Let's communicate often.
- Let's clarify our definition of success. At AVSC we value results, but we place a higher value on the things surrounding competition that the athlete has control over; effort, attendance, improvement and sportsmanship. Typically, if an athlete masters these items, the results will follow.

SUCCESS IN SKIING IS A JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND MILES

Taking the long view

Taking the long view applies to your child's development as well as to your own response to that development. The training that will make an eight-year-old the area's fastest eight-year-old skier may not be the training that will benefit that skier the most in the long run. Making decisions now that will benefit the skier over the long haul of a skiing career calls for prudence, and it can mean sacrificing some rewards now for huge gains later. Now we make them solid on the skis; now we make them fit; now we teach them to set goals and to expect great things, and later they may perform at a high level. Our destination is not two weeks down the road, but several years.

Your skier's career in the program will have many peaks and valleys. For the new parent and skier, the first sign of a problem usually looks bigger than it really is. The same is true with the first sign of success; it's best not to get too worked up. You will see these ups and downs again, over and over.

How They Do Versus What They Do

Especially at younger ages, how fast a child ski and how well he or she places in a race have little significance for how that skier will do later in a more difficult series. Many national caliber athletes were not at all noteworthy as twelve-year old. Competition times and places often tell you not about the amount of skiing talent a child has, but about how early a developer he or she is. What is truly important in determining future skiing success is what happens every day in practice: Are they developing skills and technique? Are they internalizing the attitudes of a champion? Are they gradually gaining powerful fundamentals and building for the future? The work done is cumulative, with every training session adding a grain of sand to what will eventually become a mountain.

THE INCREDIBLE INFLUENCE YOU HAVE

You Are Key to Your Child's Skiing Experience

A parent's attitude toward skiing, our core values, the program, the coach, and his or her child's participation, is key towards the child's attitude and success. The young skier takes cues from his/her

parent. If the parent shows by word, deed, facial expression, etc., that he does not value skiing, that he doesn't appreciate having to drive to training or stand along the course at a race, that "it's not going to matter" if the child skips practices sessions, then the chances are very good that the child will lack commitment, have little success, and lose interest. Support your child's interest in skiing by being positively interested and a good role model of AVSC core values.

Teach Them to Dream Big

The possibilities are infinite. If we try to temper a child's dreams, if we teach them to settle for the ordinary, we may indeed save them from many a heartache and many a failure. But we also rob them of the opportunity of achieving great things, and the opportunity to plumb their depths and realize their full potential.

Allow Your Skier to Be Resilient

Winning big means failing many times along the way. Each failure hurts, but these temporary setbacks create the strength for the final push. Instead of having children avoid failure by never taking risks, teach them how to think about failing: risk-taking and failure are necessary for improvement, development, motivation, feedback, and long-term success.

Failure and responding to that failure are part of life.

It's okay for your child to be upset about, disappointed with, and even angry about having done poorly. Feeling lousy for a few minutes is natural and is not a threat to self-esteem.

Ideally this will motivate them to try harder and do better the next time. We will strive to teach them standards of good and bad performance, so that when they really do well, they feel an appropriate sense of accomplishment.

Your Support is Needed

As they succeed then fail then succeed again, kids will ride emotional roller coasters. One of your most important functions as a skiing parent is to provide emotional support during the tough times, of which there will be many. Kids also have few previous experiences to tell them that confidence is well founded. They will get this self-confidence from outside the realm of their own experiences, from the coach or parent. Let them believe that you believe they can succeed! Let them know that they are still loved, no matter how poorly they think they skied.

Success

Only one skier can win the race. Often in the younger age groups, the winner will be the one who has bloomed early, not necessarily the skier with the most talent or the most potential to ultimately succeed in skiing. It is expected that every parent wants his or her child to succeed, wants his or her child to learn from skiing. Success really means being the very best you can be, striving for improvement in every aspect of skiing. It leads to lasting enjoyment.

Responding to Successful Results

Don't get too impressed, or shower praise too highly for successful results – leave room for when your child gets a lot better. Ask how they feel and what they are proud of. We discourage treating the young athlete like a superstar, because the more you treat them like a superstar, the less likely they will become one. Pampered kids aren't tough. Similarly, be careful not to brag about your skier to other parents and

make sure your skier doesn't brag to his/her peers. If your skier is really good, it will be apparent to everyone without your having to tell anyone.

The Danger of Bribery

Bribing your skier to perform well by promising presents, money, special meals, etc. for meeting various standards is highly discouraged. It may work in the short run – the skier may indeed ski fast this afternoon – but the long-term consequences can be harmful. It is imperative that a skier wants to perform well for his/her own internal reasons.

Work and Fun

Persistence and work ethic are the most important qualities leading to success in skiing and life. It is critical to create and cultivate that work ethic when a skier is young. The meaning of fun is very much an open question for children. We will emphasize that fun means working hard and challenging yourself, taking pride in accomplishing difficult goals, and discovering talents you didn't know you had. Ski racing is fun!

Your Reaction to Mistakes at Races

Kids make mistakes at races. It's going to happen. When it does, please handle it gracefully. Complaints and excuses are uncalled for. The official or timer generally has a much better vantage on your child's race than you do and is looking on dispassionately. If a placement is questionable, as is sometimes the case, the coach will take the proper steps. But please realize that jury decisions are almost never overturned.

Home and AVSC Must Dovetail

Traits of discipline, respect, high expectations, and commitment at home directly influence the child's approach at training and races. Parents should carefully consider our core values and other formative memos about the values the team espouses. Parents should also reinforce suggestions from the coaches. A skier must have trust in his/her coach and in the program and will not if parents suggest something different or something in a different volume. If you have concerns about the coaching or the coaching advice, talk to the coach directly. If in the end you feel that you cannot support the coach or the program, your best course is to find a team whose coach you do trust.

The Next Jessie Diggins?

In order to make it to the Olympics, many things over a long time have to go right. Therefore, be cautious of getting your hopes too high and try not to judge every race by Olympic standards. The most important factors will be practice, practice and practice. Howard Gruber is a psychologist who has made a life work out of studying great achievers. He argues the difference between the very good and the truly great isn't talent, but much harder and more consistent work.

How Kids Work

You as parents already know a lot about the development of children. The following suggestions address child development as it pertains to ski racing.

Kids are Inconsistent

There is nothing that any coach or parent can do to change the fact that developing youth are inconsistent. A ten-year old skier who knows better will in the pressure of a race take a wrong turn that is clearly marked. Another young skier will take twenty seconds off her best time in a race this week, and next week add it all back, with interest. One week it will seem that skate technique is mastered, and the next week that it's never been introduced. It's enough to make your hair turn gray. Learn to expect it and even to enjoy it.

Early Specialization is Discouraged

Young skiers frequently change their favorite or "best" disciplines. Skating will click suddenly, and then later just as suddenly un-click. There is no explanation for this phenomenon. An event the child hated becomes his or her favorite by virtue of their having done well at yesterday's training session. Thus, it's important to have kids ski all disciplines in practice and races and to not reinforce perceived specialties.

No Cookie-Cutter Skiers

Kids learn at different rates and in different ways. One skier picks up sprinting in a day; it takes another skier three years to master the same skill. Be extremely careful of comparing your skier to others, especially within his or her hearing. Please take great pains to avoid measuring the continuing success of your child by his performance against a particular competitor, who may well be on a completely different biological timetable from your child. Some factors are completely beyond anyone's control.

Why Doesn't He Ski Like a World Cup Skier?

Little kids are not strong enough or coordinated enough for their technique to look like older skiers, no matter how many drills they do. Parents shouldn't stress about a little thing that a skier struggles with for a time, such as a proper pole plant. Kids seem to get these things when they are ready, and not until then. We are winning the game if they steadily improve their motor control, steadily improve their conditioning, and steadily improve their attitudes.

The Rubber Band Effect

It would be easier for the skier, parents, and coaches if improvements were made slowly and gradually, if all involved could count on hard work in practice to produce corresponding improvements in competition every month. Often improvements are made in leaps, not baby steps because improvement results as much from psychology as from physiology. It is harder this way, because it is less predictable. Skiers and parents tend to become a bit discouraged during the short "plateaus" when the improvements the child is making are not obvious. Likewise, when the rubber band has snapped and the skier makes a long-awaited breakthrough, one cannot expect the nearly vertical improvement curve to continue. This does not happen.

Terminal Technique

Often young skiers, especially “successful” younger skiers who are very strong for their age, have terminal technical issues— i.e., techniques that are inefficient dead-ends that will not allow for much if any improvement. For kids with terminal technique, it is time to throw away the stopwatch, slow down, and learn to ski all over again. Often this adjustment period is characterized by slower times, which is difficult for the skier and for the parents. Difficult, but necessary, because this one-step backwards will allow for ten steps forward soon enough.

Being Coachable

For technical improvements to be made, the skier (and parent, supporting the coach’s decision) must be **coachable**: they must trust that the coach is knowledgeable and thinking of the skier’s best interests, and they must be willing to trust that the changes that can feel awful at first will help the child be a better skier.

Early and Late Bloomers

The subject of early and late bloomers is a sensitive one, but nonetheless very important for parents to understand. Early and late bloomers each have virtues and challenges.

Early Bloomers: Early Bloomers get bigger and stronger earlier than others. Consequently, they are more likely to win their races. That early success is a virtue. However, because they can often win without having to work on their technique or training very hard, they may not develop a solid work ethic and their technique might be poor. From the child’s immediate perspective, NOT working hard and NOT working on technique is a rational choice. After all, “if it isn’t broken, don’t fix it.”

Unfortunately, the size and strength advantage doesn’t last and unless the athlete has technique and work ethic to fall back on, other athletes begin to catch up to and beat this athlete at ages 13 to 15. Many early bloomers quit when their easy successes dry up. We avoid this by not allowing the early bloomers to bask in the temporary limelight. Instead we train them for their long run benefit and educate them about how they should judge their own performances both in races and in training.

Late Bloomers: Late Bloomers are smaller and weaker than the early bloomers, so they often don’t do so well at ski races. If the coach, skier, and parent emphasize results and winning, then there is little chance that this late bloomer will stay in the sport. This, too, is rational: “Why should I keep skiing? I’m obviously lousy, even though I’m working my guts out and doing everything the coach asks. I’m still getting beat! Coach is a bozo and I’m just not meant to be a skier.”

However, if the coach and parents can help the skier find enough rewards from skiing, for instance improvement, meeting personal challenges, friendships, etc., to stick it out through the lean years, and if the skier relies on technique and hard work to overcome the temporary physical deficit, then the late bloomer is in the driver’s seat in a few years.

Note: it is almost impossible to tell how talented your skier is, or how much potential your skier has for racing, by looking at age class race results. Races will often just tell you who is bigger, stronger, or more coordinated and that may not last.

PARENTS AND COACHES

Jekyll and Hyde

Coaches often undergo miraculous transformations. It is interesting to watch parents' changing attitudes and behavior towards the coach when their children are "succeeding" or "failing." When the child skis well, the coach is a good chap and everyone's happy. When the child does not do well, the coach's abilities and motives are suspect. We encourage you to treat coaches the same no matter how your children perform.

The Wisdom of Solomon

Coaches make many decisions. You won't agree with them all, and with the benefit of hindsight we often refine our thinking. Trust the coaches to act in what they consider the best interests of your child and the team as a whole and understand that this sometimes will conflict with what you see as the best interests of your child at a specific moment.

Coaching versus Over-Coaching

It is possible to over-coach and over-parent. Inexperienced coaches have a tendency to do this, especially at races. Such coaches are in the kids' faces all the time, giving them too many instructions before they race, correcting them incessantly during the warm-ups of a championship race, and controlling every little thing. Many times, the coach's speech is actually directed to a nearby parent rather than to his or her athletes. Parents might be impressed by this show of active coaching. However, over-coaching is destructive.

At training, skiers need instruction. But they also need to be allowed to try things, to watch other skiers, to feel things, and to find out what works and what doesn't, with perhaps a few leading questions from the coach. You don't teach an infant how to walk; he watches you, he tries it, he falls, he falls again and again, and in no time, he is charging around the house making mischief. When you get to a race, the general rule should be, the less said the better. In a stressful environment, the more information you try to force into a young skier's head at the last minute, the more likely you are to jam his circuits entirely. If a coach has been doing the job in practice, the skier will know how technically to ski before he gets to the race. Once at the race, we will focus on tactics and motivation almost exclusively - a couple of cues or reminders, and only a couple, and the skier can get to the start line without his mind cluttered by distracting details.

Keep us in the Loop

We often don't understand why a skier is responding to training as he is. Why is he so tired? Why is he so inconsistent? It is easy to forget that everything happening in the skier's life during the twenty-one hours a day when he is off the hill affects his skiing as much or more than the three hours of training when we are ostensibly in charge. Let us know if there are problems at home or at school that will affect your skier's training and racing performance. You don't need to give us all the details, but in order to best coach your skier individually; we have to know what is happening individually.

Talk to the Coach

It is most effective to communicate with the coach regarding your concerns about the program or your child's progress within it. Please do not burden your child with such topics.

The last thing ten year-olds need is to be caught in the middle between two adult authority figures. Likewise, it can be detrimental to disparage a coach or the program to other parents. Talk to the coach involved. We as coaches will welcome dialogue that makes us better and thus more successful in our careers. It can also be helpful to ask yourself: "What am I doing to help the situation?"

Treating your child the same

As your child begins to race more and qualify for higher races the expectations from the athlete, parents, and coaches seems to increase. This couldn't be farther from the truth. We as coaches, you as parents, and the athletes themselves need to have the same routine for and put the same emphasis on each race whether it is the Community Race Series or the Junior National Championship. Extra expectations or preparations for a major event only put more pressure on the athlete, if we can treat all races the same and have the same expectations for the athletes to do the best they can at each event they will be much better prepared for any event no matter how big.

IN SUMMARY

In closing, let us reiterate how privileged we feel to be a part of your child's development as a person and their career as a ski racer. We believe that by instilling a love for the sport and emphasizing our core values we can positively affect all participants in a positive manner, and pave the way for athletic excellence at the same time. We will need each other in this process, and by working together, we can help your child best realize their athletic potential and develop character traits that will serve them throughout their lives.

Parent Agreement

By signing below, you acknowledge that you have read and understand AVSC Nordic's Golden Rules, guidelines and responsibilities.

Name (Print) _____

Signature _____

Date _____

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THE GEAR GUIDE

(WRITTEN FOR THE “NEW TO NORDIC” FAMILY)

Clothing and equipment choices can make or break a skiing experience for any skier! Here are some guidelines suggested by AVSC coaches and athletes:

Follow this link for program specific requirements: <https://www.teamavsc.org/Equipment>

ESSENTIALS

- Make sure your backpack is big enough to fit all of your schoolwork, ski gear, as well as plenty of snacks for after practice and an extra water bottle!
- Layers of synthetic clothing or wool will help keep you dry, warm and happy. Never wear cotton while skiing. Cotton is only appropriate for changing into after practice.
- Clearly label all of your gear with your name in permanent marker.
- Wear your water carrier and bring water every day.
- Always have sun block on hand. The snow reflects UV light and can be very harmful to skin over time. Athletes should think of sunblock as part of their practice and race day uniform.
- Look for ski poles with Velcro straps and small plastic baskets.
- Boots are a very important part of your equipment set up. Make sure they fit like a running shoe and wear synthetic (non-cotton) socks to avoid blisters.
- Depending on your ability level you may have both skate and classic boots or a ‘combi’ boot that will work for both disciplines. Make sure your boots match your bindings- there are two types NNN and SNS.
- How long should your poles be? While standing in running shoes on concrete classic poles should reach your shoulder joint and skate poles should reach a point between your chin and the bottom of your nose. Remember, if you are growing quickly, you can cut your skate poles down to become classic poles!

A few things Nordic skiers should avoid are

- Bulky gloves make hands sweat and then sweaty hands freeze. Use a mid-weight glove designed for Nordic skiing to keep your hands warm and dry.
- Camelbacks restrict shoulder movement, use a water belt instead.
- Goggles fog up, use sunglasses instead.
- Backcountry boots are not designed for track skiing- use a skate, classic, or combi boot instead.

Gear Recommendations

- Waxless (fish scale) skis are acceptable on classic days for athletes ages 5-9 (One Day Base Camp).
- Combi skis are designed for both skate and classic technique. They are appropriate for ages 5-8 (Two Day Base Camp) or skiers who weight under 60 lbs. The skis should be about as tall as the person skiing on them. If using for both skate and classic, parents must be willing to clean off kick wax before a skate practice.

- If you chose to use waxable classic skis you MUST clean off the kick wax before attending a skate practice.
- By age 10, we recommend skiers have two pairs of skis, skate and classic for all AVSC programs. Classic skis should no longer have fish scales. (Two Day Bill Koch, Devo, HS, NC)

LOOKING FOR USED GEAR?

SKATE

Flex- Squeeze the bases together (scraped/brushed) with two hands. If the athlete can easily squish the skis together, they are too soft. If they cannot compress the skis much, they are too stiff. If they are able to close the skis together with a pretty good squeeze they are just about right. (Thanks to Goldilocks and the Three Bears for this testing method.)

Ski length should be skier height.

CLASSIC

Flex- Use the Goldilocks method above to determine flex. But, use one hand to squeeze the bases together instead of two.

Ski length should be skier height plus 10 to 15 cm.

Kick Zone- Place skis (brushed and scraped) on a clean, flat table. Have the skier stand on the bindings and balance their weight equally on both skis. Slide a business card between the table and ski and mark where the card stops: top and bottom. Then do the same with 100% of the skier's weight on one ski at a time. On a good fitting pair of skis, the card will slide approximately 16-22 inches from the heel plate to the tip of the ski. You will have 4 marks on your ski. The actual kick zone (from top to bottom) is the second mark and half way between the third and fourth mark. You can also tell by the way your kick wax wears after an hour of skiing on cold snow.

WAX

The following items are good to have at home for waxing: plastic scraper, groove scraper, brush, base cleaner, a rag, non-fluorinated wax, and iron. Your coaches will help with waxing for both classic days and race days. You are responsible for coming to practice with skis that are clean; including glide wax scraped and brushed plus kick wax removed completely. Your coaches will gladly teach you how to wax throughout the season. Devo and Comp Team athletes should be waxing their race skis a couple times each week outside of practice and leave them with a full layer of wax over the summer off season.

Important! Please note! Every AVSC Nordic skier needs at least two pairs of ski ties (one for each pair of skis!

You can purchase ski ties at your local ski shops. Ski ties keep the sticky side of the ski down and prevent damage to your skis and the skis of your teammates.

At races, we will often load our skis into group bags. This makes our transition time and organization speedy and efficient. The 'group bag' system only works if everyone has their own set of ski ties for each pair of skis.

Please do not become attached to your ski ties- you bring two- you take two. It's a fun process to see which ties you end up with at the end of the day- did you get a Jefe? How about a Koons or a Randall? Maybe you can get a Ward at next practice?

The 'communal ski ties/group bag' is a great system- but, just like a team, it only works if everyone contributes! Please be a team player when it comes to ski ties!

WHERE CAN I FIND NORDIC SKI GEAR IN THE ROARING FORK VALLEY?

1. Aspen Cross Country Center (run by Ute Mountaineer)
39551 Highway 82, Aspen CO 81611
970-925-2145 (if out of season call Ute Mountaineer and ask for Paul)

2. Ragged Mountain Sports*
902 CO-133, Carbondale, CO 81623
970-510-5185

3. Replay Sports*
465 N Mill St. #11, Aspen, Co 81611
970-925-2483

****Proceeds from sales at Ragged and Replay go toward our scholarship fund!****