



Five Tips For Parents To Help Their Children In Competition

By Jon Nolting, USSA Sport Education Director

As parents you invest a lot in your children's participation in skiing and snowboarding. You commit a substantial amount of energy, time, and money to their pursuit, and as a result, it is natural to be vested emotionally in your child's performance at competition. You want your kids to do well on many different levels. But for all the sacrifices you make, are you doing the right things leading up to and on the competition day to allow your children to perform at their best? Here are five tips for ski and snowboard parents.

- 1. Be prepared and plan ahead.** For most parents, this will involve helping your child be prepared as well as yourselves. It is much more than the logistics of getting everything booked and ready to go. Preparation speaks to the training your kids receive leading up to the event. It includes eating right before and during competition, and as a parent making sure that pre-race meals are healthy, high in energy boosting carbohydrates, and that your child is well hydrated. Preparation involves getting equipment ready. You'll want to progressively put more of the preparation and planning responsibility on your child. Help teach and model good preparation habits to your children, and make sure they take ownership of these responsibilities when they are ready.
- 2. Make competition day routine.** A sure fire way to set your child up for inconsistent performance is to make competition day look much different from any other training day. Is the only time they see you out on the hill when there is an event? Do you only come to watch the big events? Will the grandparents and aunts and uncles all come out? These are variables that can be a distraction for your athlete. This doesn't mean that everyone shouldn't come out to watch them compete, quite the contrary. It does mean as a parent you must keep an eye on your child's needs when managing the rest of the family. Things like sleep and nutrition before the competition shouldn't be compromised, and during the race make sure you give your child the space they normally require to get themselves ready. The more routine that competition day is for your child, the more relaxed they will be and the more they can focus on performing well. Then make plenty of time for enjoying family and friends!
- 3. Focus on the right things.** If you want the very best results for your child, don't focus on their results. Don't bring it up before, during or after the competition. Many athletes tend to over-emphasize results as it is. Instead, help them focus on the things they have full control of. In particular, pay attention to their effort and attitude. These are things they have full control over that will help lead to good results. Many athletes have a belief that ability alone determines results, and that ability is a fixed trait, either you have it or you don't. They assume that the top competitors that are their heroes were winning since they first started skiing or riding. But Ted Ligety and Bode Miller were far from a Junior Olympic podium until they were seventeen. Even Michael Jordan was cut from the varsity basketball team in high school, and couldn't play

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for the college he wanted to because he wasn't good enough. It is important as a parent to give your kids the message that they can succeed in whatever they put their mind to. Skiing and snowboarding are no exception. So on the day of the event, focus on their effort and preparation, as well as sportsmanship and discipline. When you talk too much about results, selections, and team naming, you are reinforcing an ability-centric message. Of course you want your kids to do well, but you need to help them focus on the things they have control over, which will help them do well in the long run.



4. **Consider your competition day actions.** Do your actions tend to elevate the pressure your child feels on competition day, or are your signals re-affirming? Your child's coach should be preaching a "train like you compete, compete like you train" philosophy to help your child train with intensity and approach competition day with confidence. For many young athletes, it takes years of practice to learn how to deal with the pressure of competition and to perform consistently at their peak. The worst thing you can do as a parent is to add to that pressure. So ask yourself, do I get very emotionally charged up on competition day for my child? It is OK if you do, but don't let it impact how you act around your child. And if it is too difficult to manage, pull yourself away. Many parents choose to volunteer at their children's competitions specifically to distract them from these feelings. Other helpful strategies on competition day are to cheer for all the competitors during the event (it can distract you from your anxieties about your own child and models good sportsmanship) or to go skiing or riding with a group before and after competition runs. What better way to enjoy the different mountains and pull yourself away? (Many resorts offer discounted lift tickets to parents on competition day.) You want to be ready to support your child as they need you.
5. **Have fun.** If you are relaxed and having fun on competition day, your child is much more likely to enjoy themselves as well. The number one reason kids participate in sports is to have fun. Fun can be made up of a lot of things, thrill of the sport, time with friends, enjoyment of the outdoors, and performing well are primary fun aspects of skiing and snowboarding. Making sure your kids can experience those aspects of the sport they find fun on a regular basis is one of your most important roles as a parent. Competition days often can either reinforce this enjoyment, or can erode it. Keep the mood light and results in perspective and there is a better chance your children will enjoy competing. There are great lessons to be learned on competition day, lessons that help shape who your children will become. After all, isn't this a big part that makes that investment you make into your child's ski or snowboard program so worthwhile?