

EAGLE RIVER JUNIOR NORDIC SKI PROGRAM PARENT HANDBOOK

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

- ❖ ERJN HOTLINE: 689-7661
- ❖ OFFICIAL EAGLE RIVER TEMPERATURE: 694-2929
- ❖ ERJN COORDINATOR: Will Taygan - 688-5288
- ❖ ERJN E-MAIL: ski@taygan.com

INTRODUCTION

The Eagle River Junior Nordic program provides an opportunity for children to enjoy winter while learning the sport of cross-country skiing. Children ages 4 through 14 of all abilities are welcome to join and learn a sport they can pursue for a lifetime. The emphasis is on having fun and learning proper technique rather than competition. ERJN is a parent run volunteer organization affiliated with Eagle River Nordic Ski Club. The program is run by a Volunteer Coordinator, who organizes the volunteer parent coaches, helpers and schedules the practices. All parents of participants are encouraged to volunteer at various times throughout the season.

ELIGIBILITY

ERJN is open to all children ages 4 through 14. Children 5 and younger **MUST** have a parent participate at each practice. It is our experience that children younger than 6 are not ready to go out with a group without their parents on cold dark nights.

FEES

ERJN is self-supporting. The fee is \$35.00 for a family membership to the Eagle River Nordic Ski Club and an additional \$50.00 for the first child; \$20.00 for each additional child thereafter. The fee covers a facilities user fee paid to the Municipality. Scholarships are available for families unable to afford the fee. Applicants for scholarship should submit a letter to the Board. The scholarships are administered by the Board.

OTHER EXPENSES

Expenses not covered by the program fee include skis, boots and poles, water bottles, and charges for special events such as Besh Cup Races or other similar races. In addition, all skiers must have warm protective clothing to keep them both safe and happy when it is particularly cold.

The ERJN program does have a limited number of skis, bindings and pole sets available for rent on a first come first served basis.

COMMUNICATIONS

THE HOTLINE NUMBER IS 689-7661

The HOTLINE tells you if practice will be held and provides timely information on upcoming special events, etc. The message on the answering machine is revised for each practice session and normally updated by 5 p.m. However, during periods of weather conditions listed below the HOTLINE may not be updated until as late as 5:30 p.m. **Check the HOTLINE** before you leave for practice each evening. **The HOTLINE is the final word on the practice.** Since weather and trail conditions can change rapidly, the use of the HOTLINE provides the necessary venue for getting information out to the parents.

PRACTICE LOCATION

ERJN practice sessions are held at Beach Lakes Trail Chalet located between the High School and Birchwood Elementary on the opposite side of the road.

PRACTICE SCHEDULE

The ski season begins in mid-November and continues through early March.

The first practice is scheduled on a Saturday during daylight hours so the skiers can become somewhat familiar with the meeting area and surrounding trails. Each skier then attends practice twice a week from 6:45-8:00p.m. Due to the large number of participants, ERJN will hold two sessions a week. One session is Monday/Wednesday and the other session on Tuesday/Thursdays. Parent must choose within which session their child or children will participate. Polar Cubs, White, Blue, Purple, Green and Orange Groups will have the opportunity to choose between the two sessions. The Competition Group will meet T/TH only. A yearly schedule is distributed at the time of registration. Attendance is not mandatory.

Groups leave the Chalet area as early as 7:00pm. Skiers arriving late will not be able to find their group without assistance from their parents. It is the responsibility of the parent to find the proper group if late. Plan to arrive no later than 6:45pm so that your skiers can find their groups, wax their skis and receive any necessary instructions before groups leave the stadium area. If a child is late they cannot be allowed to ski alone or to search for the group alone.

WEATHER

Practice is normally scheduled regardless of weather conditions. However, practice may be cancelled due to the following conditions: heavy snowfall, rain, "boiler plate" (sheet of ice) conditions, high winds, and if the official Beach Lake Chalet temperature registers zero (0) degrees F or colder. Temperatures will be posted on the Hotline by 5:30 p.m. on practice nights. If there is no snow, as is sometimes the case at the start of the program, skiers will have an alternative activity such as dryland training with games etc. It is

possible that older skiers may ski provided that the snow is good even if the weather drops below 0 degrees. This will be at the discretion of the coaches for that night and will be **announced on the HOTLINE**.

WHAT TO BRING TO PRACTICE

Children are not allowed to ski without adequate protection for the weather. This includes hat, gloves, jackets and snow pants of some kind, **NOT JEANS**. However, skiing is a strenuous activity so skiers should not overdress. All skiers must be well fed and should take their medications before practice or as prescribed. A water bottle is recommended for all children and especially those with asthma. This cuts down on the coaches giving children water from their bottles, which can pass on viral infections. These water bottles should be carried at the waist, in a coat pocket, or in a small nap sack. The children will need their hands and coaches cannot be responsible for carrying everyone's things.

PARENT PARTICIPATION

ERJN is a parent volunteer organization and only works if parents are willing to pitch in and help on occasion. As an example, having every parent volunteer as a parent helper at least two times during the season. The Parent helpers accompany a group of skiers during practice to assist the coach in getting the group organized, to help keep the group together and to take cold or tired skiers back to the chalet. It is not necessary for the parent to be a good skier to be a PARENT HELPER. The parent helper gets a good workout as well. Parent volunteers can also help before the season starts and after the season ends, to clean and inventory equipment. We encourage all parents to assist at one or more various other assignments during the season. There are a number of volunteer categories on the registration form to choose from:

COACHES and PARENT HELPERS

The ERJN Coordinator solicits parent volunteers and other members of the ski community to coach our children. These are not paid positions. However we do try to offer some kind of a benefit for those who do step forward to lead a skills group. See the ERJN Coordinator for more details about these benefits and to be a Lead Group Coach. You do not have to be an expert skier to be a Lead group coach or parent helper. Lead group coaches are responsible for daily curriculum (sample curriculum are available from previous years), games and putting children into sub-groups. Each sub-group has at least one parent helper who takes the kids out and teaches technique and fun ways to ski. Get to know your child's parent helpers and Lead Group Coach. Communicate with them any concerns you may have.

CURRICULUM

ERJN skiers learn both classical (diagonal) and skate skiing. The first half of the season will be devoted to developing a firm foundation in the classic technique, after mid-January, we will concentrate on the skate technique. The technique of the night for the older skiers

is listed on the schedule, (although it can change due to snow conditions) and announced on the hotline. Skiers learn proper care and handling of equipment, trail etiquette, good sportsmanship and how to act responsibly in the outdoors. A typical practice session will include a warm-up period, a lesson in technique, and a fun activity. Activities for younger skiers emphasize fun on skis, balance, strength and coordination.

All skiers are assigned to one of 7 skill/interest groups based upon ability level. The skill groups are in turn divided into smaller groups. Advancement to the next higher group is determined by the coaching staff and occurs when the skier has:

- (1) mastered all the techniques taught at his or her current group level,
- (2) demonstrated a responsibility level consistent with promotion,
- (3) demonstrated understanding of etiquette and ski rules consistent with promotion, and
- (4) demonstrated the physical stamina necessary for the next higher group.

This advancement determined by the coaching staff may occur at any time during the season, and may also include adjusting a skier to a different group with more or less skill levels in the attempt to place them with a group of skiers with similar skill levels. This keeps a skier from lagging behind in a faster group, or becoming bored in a slower group.

SKILL/INTEREST GROUPS

POLAR CUBS Ages 4-5 Comfort on Skis without Poles

Our youngest beginners learn to feel comfortable on skis, with basic diagonal (classic) technique, safety and etiquette. Polar Cubs and their coaches **ski without poles** all year for safety reasons. A **parent** must ski with the child at this level, and the parent may ski with or without poles.

WHITE GROUP Ages 6-7 Beginner Classic Skiing - Hill Skills + Stamina.

Beginning skiers focus on learning classic skiing without poles for the first part of the season, with special attention paid to safe hill techniques. Introduction to classic skiing with poles, and pre-skating skills are taught later in the season, along with trail safety and etiquette.

BLUE GROUP Ages 7-8 Advanced Beginner Classic + Skating Introduction

Advanced Beginner Skiers develop classical technique with poles for at least the first month. (Skiers should already be proficient in classic skiing without poles.) As the season progresses, skiers will learn skate skiing as well as safety and trail etiquette. Emphasis is on having fun and learning techniques through skill drills and games.

PURPLE GROUP Ages 8-9 Younger Intermediate Classic + Skating

Intermediate skiers learn to put together the techniques of classical and skate skiing to move fast and effortlessly along the trail. Skiers should already be proficient in basic classic skiing both with and without poles, and also comfortable with basic skate skiing.

Purple skiers generally will review and refine classic techniques early in the season, with skate skiing emphasized later in the season. Purple groups have developed more independence on their skis, emphasizing group cohesiveness, etiquette and physical stamina.

GREEN GROUP Ages 9-14 Older Intermediate Classic + Skate

Advanced skiers that have passed the Purple Group skills evaluation. Emphasis on recreational skiing. Usually classic techniques are reviewed and refined early in the season, with skate techniques developed later in the winter. The Green Group will concentrate on increasing stamina, classic touring technique and becoming proficient with the primary skate skiing strokes and poling.

ORANGE GROUP Ages 10-14 Older Beginners : Classic + Skate

For older beginner skiers. This group will work on basic classic and skate technique with goal to catch group up to appropriate age proficiency.

Competition Group Ages 9-14 Competitive Skiers

Competition becomes more of a focus while still emphasizing fun. These skiers are learning advanced diagonal and skate technique as well as racing techniques and strategy. All kids are encouraged to participate in local races as well as the Besh Cup Races and any other races they desire to ski.

The ERJN offers two racing activities each season. These races take the place of normal practice that day. The activity may include a relay race, an orienteering event, an obstacle race course or a short kilometer distance race. They are designed to be a fun activity for the kids.

COMPETITION AND RACING

Because the philosophy of ERJN is to encourage children to learn and enjoy cross country skiing as a lifetime activity, competition and racing are not the most important part of the program. Skiers move at their own pace through the skill groups and are encouraged to do their best. Most skiers will spend more than one year in a group. The Competition Group is encouraged to attend the Besh Cup races in the Anchorage area and also travels to Homer/Soldotna and the Fairbanks area. The ERJN Competition Group has several coaches who attend each race, help the kids wax their skis, get the kids warmed up and to the starting area according to their start times. Coaches also join parents in cheering the racers on during the race. The Besh Cup races are designed for skiers of all skill and competitive levels. Even children as young as 6 can join in short races tailored to their ability level. Skiers can earn scholarships toward the Besh Cup Races by volunteering for Eagle River Nordic Ski Club or the Junior Nordic Program. Speak with the ERJN coordinator for more details. Parents can also sign up for the races and race at their age level. All skiers are winners.

EQUIPMENT

The most important rule about equipment is **MARK ALL YOUR GEAR**. Skiers need skis, boots, and poles (as well as proper clothing—see next section)

RENTAL SKIS are available on a limited, first come, first serve basis, through ERJN for a \$40.00 fee per season. If you choose to rent, you must still provide your skier with boots. The boots must match the bindings on the rental skis which are the manual DINO NEW NORDIC NORM (NNN) bindings. Any salesperson can steer you toward the correct boot. Rental skis are combies—they work for both diagonal and skate skiing, but if you need high performance skis for an advanced skier they may not be appropriate. . SKIS need to be the right length. Here is one method of deciding on ski and pole length (there are other philosophies as well). Have your child reach for the ceiling with his or her hand. The tips of the skis should measure 2 to 3 inches below your child's wrist. Go a little shorter for beginners and little longer for hotshots. Skis come in a confusing array of styles. The best bet is a combination ski, which is designed for both classic diagonal stride and skate techniques. Do not get the NO WAX variety (fish scales on the bottom) since they will not work when your child starts to skate. If you already own waxless skis, and your child is a Polar Cub in ability, these skis would work at least until the child begins skate skiing at which time it is recommended you rent ERJN skis. Do not get the strap-on type skis. It is not possible to learn to use the ski edges properly with these skis and really limits the skier's ability to advance with the group.

Skis for the smallest skiers can be a problem, particularly if the boots do not fit the skis well. There is nothing that drains the enthusiasm faster than repeatedly having to put skis on after they have slipped from the bindings. (Especially for the parent who gets this job.) Three pin bindings and very old NNN bindings are the biggest culprits.

BOOTS must match the BINDINGS chosen. Boots are specialized like skis, but a combination boot, which is designed to work for both the traditional diagonal and the skate techniques, is the best value. Remember to get boots that have a little extra room to accommodate wool socks and some foot growth during the season. Feet that are squeezed into boots that are too small are often COLD feet.

POLE length ideally varies with the technique. If your child is a beginner in White Group, poles should come just above the armpits. A good compromise for Blue and Purple is a pole that comes almost to the child's chin. For Green and Orange, skating poles should come up to the mouth when standing on flat feet. And diagonal (classic) poles should come up just above the bottom of the armpits.

DRESS REQUIREMENTS

The key to a happy skier is being warm enough for conditions, but not so bundled up as to

prevent movement. The secret is to make sure you have the following **LAYERING** system:

VENTILATION—closest to the skin to allow perspiration to move away from the skin.
INSULATION—to trap the warmth generated by your body and keep you warm.
PROTECTION—the outer layer that protects you from wind and wet. **NO PART OF THE LAYERING SYSTEM SHOULD INCLUDE ANY COTTON CLOTHING. COTTON IS THE WORST MATERIAL FOR WARMTH AND PROTECTION.**

Breathable synthetic long underwear provides the ventilation layer. Fleece, wool, down, or a synthetic material provides the insulation layer, and the jacket, provides the protection layer. Wind pants are recommended during periods of wind or extreme cold. Vary the insulation layer based on the temperature keeping in mind that skiers warm up when they are moving but cool off when they are not. Keeping the extremities warm is the biggest challenge when it is cold. Mittens work much better than gloves. Wool socks over polypro socks keeps the feet warm. Wool socks with a hole cut in the toe or boot covers are essential during cold weather.

The hat is a must. **NO HAT, NO PRACTICE!** On cold days a neck warmer keeps both the neck and the lower face warm and is recommended for children with asthma. During periods of cold and marginal weather coaches are sensitive to conditions and may shorten practice on occasion. However, if a skier is properly dressed there is no reason not to be comfortable skiing at a temperature below +5 degrees.

Remember to **MARK ALL YOUR CLOTHES, SKI BOOTS, POLES AND SKIS.** Write your name on a piece of paper and tape over it right on to the ski.

SAFETY

There are risks inherent in any outdoor activity like cross country skiing and although every effort is made to prevent accidents, minor scrapes and bumps do occur from time to time. Parents are responsible for making sure their children know and follow the rules to prevent injury to themselves and others. The most important rules that parents should discuss with their children are:

- ❖ **You must ski with your Group.**
- ❖ **Obey the coach and parent helpers.**
- ❖ **Ski the technique of the night.** Listed on the schedule or announced on the hotline.
- ❖ **Never ski alone.** If you are late, you cannot go and find your group alone. A parent can ski with you or you may join a group that has not left the stadium. If you are in front of the group and come to an intersection, always stop and wait for the coach.
- ❖ **Never leave your group without permission.**
- ❖ **Use your equipment properly**—especially poles (people have been seriously injured

by the sharp points of ski poles.) Keep poles pointed at the ground and do not point with poles or use them for games like tripping others.

- ❖ **Avoid moose encounters**—Moose are not an uncommon sight on the trail. Usually moose mind their own business, but they can be unpredictable. Never pass a moose on the trail, get between a mother and her calf, throw anything at a moose, yell at it or walk or ski toward it. If a moose moves towards you, get behind a tree or anywhere you are out of sight.
- ❖ **Remove your skis before entering the parking area.**
- ❖ **No playing in parking area without your parents present and with you.**

DISCIPLINE

The inherent dangers involved in cross country skiing combined with the large size of ERJN require that children promptly obey the rules established by the coaches, parent helpers. Children who are unable to obey the rules pose a threat to the safety of others as well as themselves and put an unfair burden on the coaches, other children, and parents. Children who are unable to follow the rules established by the coaches will not be allowed to attend practice. Normally, the following progressive procedures will apply:

- (1) First infraction—Formal warning to skier
- (2) Second infraction—Meeting between coach, child, and parent
- (3) Third infraction—Suspension for 2 weeks
- (4) Fourth infraction—Suspension from the program.

At the discretion of the board, certain serious infractions (such as fighting or situations involving risks of physical harm) may result in deviation from this progressive discipline policy, up to and including immediate suspension.

MEDICAL

If your child has a medical condition that may need to be treated out on the trails (asthma, food allergies....) let the head coach and your child's coach know. This is very important and helps avoid a crisis situation.

TRAILS

ERJN heavily impacts the ski trails at Beach Lake Trails. The ski trails are maintained by the Eagle River Nordic Ski Club and Parks and Rec. We strongly encourage ERJN families to volunteer some time for the maintenance of these ski trails. Various volunteer opportunities arise during summer trail work sessions.

BOARD MEETINGS

The Eagle River Nordic Ski Club holds monthly board meetings during the winter. All members are invited to attend.