

Skaters and Parents Handbook – CIFSC Policies and FAQs

On-Ice Attire

Proper skating attire is required for on-ice skating.

Off-ice Responsibilities

Please act with the utmost respect at all competitions and test sessions; we are all reflections of our skating program and we should represent it well. Skaters, please be conscientious about your attention to and comments made at the result board at competitions. Also, there is no need to hang around the result board; they will all arrive, please be patient at a distance.

Notes to Parents

If a parent desires to talk to a skater during a skating session, please ask your skater to come off the ice and have the conversation. Having the conversation while the skater is on the ice may divert the skater's attention from other skaters and cause an accident. Parents should never approach judges or officials at a competition or test session. This duty is left up to the skating professional. Please remember to remain in the stands (away from the ice surface) at competitions and test sessions. Once the coach is at the event, it is their duty to get a skater ready to perform. The parents should let the coach do this with no interruptions as to allow the skater to mentally and physically prepare for their event. Please be conscientious of comments made at the result board and in the stands at a skating event. If your skater is staying at a competition or test session to support the other skaters, please make sure that they find a seat and cheer them on. It is difficult enough for coaches to keep track of their skaters that are supposed to be preparing without other groups of kids around them. It is also important that our skaters represent themselves and their club well at all skating events, meaning no running around please.

General Comment: If any member of the club has questions or concerns about any aspect of CIFSC rules, regulations, programs and operations it is requested that the same be directed to a member of the Board of Directors.

Private Lessons and Coaching Suggestions for Parents

When you've reached the point of private lessons, picking a coach is a very important decision. We have many coaches available to choose from.

Your Relationship With Your Coach

Your coach is your skating instructor. How do you get one? When do you need one? What should you expect from your coach?

Your relationship with skating coaches usually begins when you take your first group lesson in a Learn-to-Skate program. Group lessons are generally taught by several of the coaches at any given rink, and during your time in these programs you will have the opportunity to meet and work with several different coaches. Use this time to observe them, their techniques, their personality, their teaching and interpersonal skills, their compatibility with your interests.

When you are ready to advance beyond the group lesson environment, you will select a pro to become your teacher. Do not make this decision lightly, skating costs a lot of money, takes a lot of your time, and you only live once. Hopefully, your group lesson time will have helped you to form some initial ideas. Talk to other skaters (and parents) who have been skating a while to see what their experiences have been like, interview the coaches that you have an interest in, watch them working one-on-one with their students. Ask about their membership in the Professional Skaters Association, their credentials and experience.

Be aware that there is a limited amount of ice time at all rinks, and instructor's schedules will fill up. You may not be able to make arrangements with your first choice. Some clubs or rinks have their own methods of matching coaches and incoming students. At almost all rinks however, the business relationship between a coach and student is a personal contract. You deal directly with the coach, not the club or rink to make your arrangements. You will be billed by, and pay, the coach directly, not the rink or club. So, when you have made your decisions, talk directly to the coach involved to see if you can get together.

What to Expect From Your Coach

Your coach will become your personal instructor. When you first contract with a coach, you should have a long talk about your goals and expectations in skating. Working together, you should build a general plan for how you will achieve those goals. But then you should trust the pro to work out the day-to-day lesson plans and order of attack. They know best how to teach the elements, and in what order they should be learned. Don't be afraid to revisit the goals and expectations discussion once in a while, but don't try to micromanage the coach's method of getting there either.

Your coach will help you to establish an appropriate lesson and practice schedule. The coach will help you to balance the appropriate amount of lesson time with practice time.

A general guideline is that for each 15 minutes of lesson time, a skater should have at least 30 minutes of practice time to reinforce those lessons. Some skaters will need more, some will need less. In particular, younger skaters may need a higher ratio of lesson time because they will likely have a harder time "self-directing" practice time. Usually, coaches give lessons of about 15, 20, or 30 minutes duration or even a full hour lesson. This will vary according to the needs of the skater, demands upon the coach's time, and the length of ice sessions.

Your coach will help you to make decisions about testing and competing. They will prepare you appropriately for these events. When it is time for a "program", they will generally cut your music. The coach often will suggest music that they think is appropriate to your skills, level, and interests. Do not be afraid to give them suggestions in this area. Your coach will choreograph your program to suit the music and meet the technical requirements of the event.

When you test, your coach will usually be present at your test session to help you warm up, and to provide support / guidance as you need it. Similarly, when you compete, you should expect that the pro will go to the competition with you to guide your warmup and provide any last-minute support you need (they usually call it "putting you on the ice"). You should expect the coach to respect you both personally and as a skater. Your coach may be a demanding "yelly" kind of pro or might be a soft-spoken "cuddly" type. Either way, you should expect to be fairly and professionally treated. Your coach may have to make you work hard when you don't want to, or when you just can't seem to get a new concept and may have to yell or demand a little to get you to do it. But you should never be demeaned or made fun of. Your coach will almost certainly have to touch you, and position and move your body parts around a little bit to show you how to do the elements but should never take liberties with your private parts or do anything to make you feel personally uncomfortable.

Finally, expect to be billed for the coach's time. As mentioned earlier, your business relationship will probably be directly with the coach. S/he will bill you directly, usually on a fixed schedule. You should make your payments directly to the coach. Rates will vary in different areas, and according to the skill level of the pro. In my area, non-elite skaters generally expect to pay somewhere between \$30 and \$80 per hour. The coach will bill you for cutting music. Expect a bill for time spent with you at a test session or competition. If the test/competition is not at your home rink, you should expect a fee for travel, and room/board if it is an overnight competition (often coaches will divide their expenses among the students they have at a competition, sometimes they just have a fixed fee).

What Your Coach Should Expect From You

Your coach should expect your attention and your best effort. No pro expects every student to do everything right the first time, but they do expect you to TRY, every time. Do not waste your coach's time, or your parent's money, through lack of effort. Your coach should expect you to respect them, just as you expect them to respect you. Treat them with courtesy on and off the ice. Do not speak badly about them when they demand things of you. Do not give them attitude on the ice. Leave your personal troubles behind you when you step onto the ice and focus on the skating. When you will be unable to attend a lesson, try to notify the pro in advance. Remember that for many coaches teaching IS their job, and the income they derive from it may be paying their bills. If you are unable to attend a lesson, they may be able to fit in an extra lesson for someone else in the time you're not there, but they need to know in advance to make those arrangements. Many coaches will charge you a regular lesson fee if do not cancel in advance or give them as much advanced notice as possible.

Pay Your Bills in a Timely Manner.

Finally, trust your coach. Sometimes they'll ask you to learn things you can't see any need for. Or they'll want you to wait on some elements until after you've perfected other skills. As long as you've jointly set out your long-term goals, trust them to get you there.

Team Teaching

In many rinks, you will find some coaches that "team teach". This means that two or more coaches will get together and accept students "jointly". The coaches will coordinate their lessons with you, and on any given day you might get one or the other. Sometimes this is done for scheduling purposes, sometimes it is done because the coaches are working together to make a stronger package (say one is really strong on jumps and the other is strong on spins), sometimes it's done when a long-term coach is helping a younger coach to get started. If your pro offers you this arrangement, be sure to understand it before you agree to it (who gets paid what, when and how many lessons with each coach, who goes to competitions, etc.), but don't be afraid of it as long as you understand it.

If your coaches don't team-teach, you may still find it to your advantage to select different coaches for different disciplines. You might choose one coach for dance and another for freestyle. Or sometimes a different one for moves in the field, etc. This is not uncommon, but like team teaching, it should be entered into with a full understanding on everyone's part of what the arrangements will be at test or competition time, and when scheduling conflicts arise.

Choreography

And then there's choreography. Often, especially at the higher levels, skaters will contract with a choreographer to help set (design) the program, and to work with the presentation elements associated with that program. When this is done there needs to be a good understanding and working relationship between the choreographer and the freestyle coach. Usually, these relationships are entered into upon the advice of your freestyle coach.

Ballet/Aerobics

Competitive skaters often take off-ice training in ballet. The discipline, balance, and body-awareness that ballet teaches are of great help to skaters in controlling their jumps and spins. The presentation skills that ballet teaches can significantly improve the appearance of a competitive program. Off ice aerobics and workout programs are similarly of great value to skaters and should be considered for all competitive performers. Your skating coach should be able to help you find ballet and workout programs that are oriented towards figure skaters. You may even have such programs right at your own rink.

When It All Fails... Changing Coaches

You should expect, and be willing to work through, hard times in any relationship. There will be times in your relationship with your pro that you'd just as soon never see him/her again, and you'd just like to hang it up. Try to work through those.

But if it all else fails, and you can't work it out, don't be afraid to change coaches. It's your money, and your child's skating career. Don't forget to pay all your bills when you leave. Even if your arrangements haven't worked out, don't forget that its usually a 2-way street, and the same problems might not exist for other skaters, don't spread bad stories and bad will for the coach. Particularly, if they team coach or recommend additional off-ice or semi-private or advance group lessons.

The primary coach is the one you have selected to guide your skater's career. You are free to change coaches if you want. Just be respectful and communicate your desires. You are the one paying for instruction and have the freedom to choose who, and how you want to advance your skater's progress.

A Parent's Responsibility

The most important thing for a skating parent to remember is that their skater is a person first, and a skater second. And in all probability the "person" in the skater is a young one, still growing, still maturing. Sometimes skaters seem so grown up, so easily able to handle pressure situations, that we forget they are still kids. The same kids that we see looking so grown-up on the competition ice probably still cuddle their favorite stuffed animals when they go to bed at night. Let them be kids and support them as they grow.

Some other things for parents to think about as they approach the sport:

- **Balance:** Make sure there is balance in your skater's life. Allow time for school and personal growth. Very few skaters make skating their life career. Don't put so much focus on your child's skating that you forget they'll have to function in a "normal world" when they grow up. School is important. Social development is important. Being a kid is important.
- **Help to set goals:** Help your child to set his/her goals in skating. Help him or her to be realistic about those goals, but also to make them challenging enough to make the sport fulfilling. Make sure the goals are your SKATER's goals, not yours. Help to achieve these goals by setting targets, plotting progress, etc. Be willing to reevaluate when necessary.
- **Learn about the sport:** Learn enough about skating to recognize the elements. Know enough to know when something is done well, and when it is done less well. Recognize progress. Be interested and listen when your skater talks about progress or problems.
- **Support your Coach:** Pay your bills on time, get your skater to the rink on time. When you can't be there, make sure to tell the coach in advance. Let the coach participate in goal-setting discussions if possible; or if not, at least ensure that the coach understands your skater's goals. Listen to your coach's advice and instructions and help to ensure that your skater follows those instructions when practicing or doing off-ice activities. Once the coach understands your skater's goals, let the coach have the freedom to design a program to achieve them, don't try to second-guess the approach. On the other hand, responsibly watch to make sure that the general goals are being addressed over the long term.
- **Watch:** Don't use the rink as a babysitter. Stay and watch your skater practice, and in lessons, at least sometimes. They need to know you're interested. Often skaters whose parents never watch in practice feel very self-conscious or pressured when their parents finally do show up to watch. If competition events are the only time you watch your skater, you may be hurting them more than helping them.
- **Be a good sport:** Remember that every skater is someone's child, and that they ALL deserve to be treated fairly and with respect. Be willing to recognize other skaters graciously. When someone else is skating in a competition, don't walk back and forth in the bleachers, don't be noisy or disruptive.

- **Support your skater:** Remember, your skater is still maturing. Offer praise when appropriate but be realistic with that praise; recognize progress towards goals but be willing to acknowledge when more work is needed without making that a bad thing. Never destructively criticize, especially in front of others. Resist the urge to compare your child against another. Some learn faster, some learn slower.
- **Support your Club:** Pay your bills on time. Help with club activities. Most clubs are run by volunteers, and they need all the help they can get. Be willing to work on committees or serve on the Board of Directors if needed. Be willing to do volunteer jobs like ice monitor, music monitor, etc. Help out with ice shows or competitions.

Clothing Guidelines

Obviously when you compete or test you'll want to wear something that's a bit special, and comfort won't be your first priority. But what about all those hours you spend practicing?? Here comfort and safety will be more important to you. It is important that whatever you wear be loose enough to not restrict your motion. It should not be so loose or baggy that it presents a safety hazard however. You should never wear anything that is so loose that it drags on the ice, or close to your blades.

If you're prone to getting cold, consider a layered approach. A couple of thin sweaters or sweatshirts will be better than one really heavy thick one -- and you can shed layers as you heat up. Girls generally wear thin sparkly tights when competing. But for practice some skaters choose to wear those slightly baggy jogging suit or sweat suit pants over their tights. Like sweaters, these can be removed as you heat up. Another option is to get the heavier practice tights. In our area, skaters call these sweater tights, and from a distance, these look just like the regular competition tights. You might choose to wear a nylon wind suit like runners often wear. These are lightweight, and usually have a felt lining for warmth. These suits are generally nice and loose so they don't restrict you. The nylon tends to shed water, and always keeps it away from your skin, unlike tights or normal pants. And the nylon material is very slippery -- when you fall, it slides very nicely on the ice and tends to minimize the hurt.

Gloves are appropriate if your hands get cold. Most skaters wear those stretchy "one-size-fits-all" gloves. You should get lots of pairs because they always seem to disappear even faster than socks. Heavy outdoor coats generally hinder your ability to move and should probably be avoided unless it's really cold and you have no other options.

Competition and Test Clothing

It's important to realize as you go to tests or competitions that you're going there as a skater, not as a fashion model. The judges will be a lot more interested in what you do than in how you look. You should be neat and tidy, and you should ensure that your clothing is appropriate to your age and skating level.

The USFSA **does** set some minimal standards for clothing that must be followed, or deductions will be assessed during a competition. These can be found in the Rulebook and are summarized below.

- All clothing must be modest, dignified, not theatrical in design, and appropriate for athletic competition. (except for showcase/artistic events.)
- Men must wear full-length trousers - no tights are permitted.
- Men's clothing must have a neckline which does not expose the chest.
- Men's clothing must not be sleeveless.
- Ladies must have skirts and "pants" covering the hips and posterior.
- Unitards are not suggested.
- Bare midriffs are not permitted.
- Excessive decoration such as beads, sequins should be avoided, and all decorations used must be firmly fastened, so that they do not fall off on the ice. There are point deductions for costume failures.
- If you buy your clothing from a catalog supplier that caters to the skating market, you can be reasonably confident that these standards are followed. If you make your own, or get a local dressmaker to make your outfits, you should ensure that the above rules are understood.

If you do make your clothing, consider some of the following hints:

- Girl's sleeves usually have a loop at the end which can be hooked over a finger to keep the sleeves from sliding up the arms as she moves.
- Similarly, boy's pants usually have an elastic strap on the bottom that goes under the boot to keep them tidy. This strap is generally attached with Velcro.
- Make sure that the material is stretchy enough to permit movement without binding, pulling, or tearing out of the seams.

- Ladies clothing often uses flesh-colored fabric to maintain appropriate modesty while creating the illusion of less cover.
- Hot Glue guns work well for attaching sequins and small decorations, although actual needle-and-thread application is more secure for larger decorations. Or use E600 glue (it won't come off!)
- Design your clothing so that it hides any underwear that is worn and provides adequate support and cover for those occasions when it is not. Match the undergarments with the costume color.

Any further coaching questions? Feel free to ask any board member questions, or your coach for clarification of their individual coaching policies. Each coach may have different opinions and policies for their students.