

Skating Ethics for Parents

by **Ouida Robins**

Summer is a time that many skaters use to train without the time constraints of a school schedule, and others take advantage of the cool alternative the sport offers during the hot summer months. Whatever the case, most skaters find that summer offers a wonderful opportunity to improve on their skating skills.

In addition to practice, parents may also find a need to facilitate their child's improvement by taking private lessons from a skating instructor in the rink. Once a relationship with an instructor has been formed, parents are responsible for practicing ethical behavior to ensure a healthy learning environment for the skater.

What is ethics as it pertains to figure skating? Mike Paikin, former chair of the ISI ethics committee defines ethics as "the branch of philosophy dealing with values relating to human conduct, with respect to the rightness and wrongness of certain actions as well as the motives and ends of such actions."

Ethics is about knowing the difference between right and wrong, and it starts the moment parents begin their search for a skating instructor. When looking for a coach, rely primarily on your own judgment.

Although it is always acceptable to take into consideration the opinions of other parents, ultimately, decisions should be made based on personal observation and

the child's individual needs. It is also essential to select a coach based on qualifications and positive rapport, not because of discounts or false promises regarding your child's future.

Parents who make the mistake of hiring a coach based on "under the table" deals often regret doing so later and deprive their child of time better spent with another instructor. Once you, as a parent, have carefully observed the coaches at your rink and selected a suitable instructor, do your part to help establish a strong working relationship.

There are myriad ways you can build a true partnership with your child's coaches. The most significant way is to have open communication with the instructor. As time goes on, there will undoubtedly be issues you feel should be addressed regarding your child's skating. *Go first to the instructor.*

He or she will be the only one to understand and correct a problem if it needs to be fixed. Outside individuals — such as other parents, coaches or friends — may offer their advice, but the instructor is the one you should go to for clarification and solutions to an existing problem.

You have hired your coach to guide your child's skating future to the best of his or her ability. Allow the coach to do his or her job.

Another aspect of parental skating ethics pertains to the interaction between parents whose children take lessons from different coaches. *It is unethical to coerce parents working with a different coach into taking lessons from your child's instructor.*

Every parent has the right to make an individual choice regarding who their child works with, without having another parent influence their decision.

If another parent is impressed by your child's progress and inquires about your instructor, answer their questions, but let them make up their own minds. What is good for your child may not be good for someone else's.

There may come a time when you would like to make changes in your child's skating career. One of these changes could be the addition of a second instructor.

It is perfectly within the rights of a parent to hire another instructor, but good ethics encourages parents to inform the primary coach of the new addition. This will maintain good communication between the two coaches and will prevent misunderstandings or "hard feelings."

Sometimes a parent may want to change coaches completely and discontinue working with the current instructor.

Again, it is within the parents' rights to make this decision. *However, you must inform your current coach of your change before you hire another instructor.* All accrued bills must be paid before the lessons with the new coach can begin.

The fact that bills must be paid in full is a strong reason why parents should not enter into a barter system with their coaches, as it will cause future problems when/if they want to move to a new instructor.

Skating should be an enjoyable experience. It is a wonderful sport that can be pursued at all levels, from recreational to competitive.

Many diverse groups and individuals are attracted to the sport for different reasons. However, no matter what the goal, skaters should hold a love for the sport that continues as long as they are involved in it.

Coaches, parents and skaters have a responsibility to each other in working together to ensure a positive learning environment.

When parents understand their role in their child's skating career and use good ethics in their decisions, they create a recipe for success!



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