

Mental Training for Entry Level Children (ages 6-10 years)

Introduction

Within *Fun-damental* entry-level programs the focus is on fun and participation. The coaches' goal is to create a fun, safe, and healthy learning environment that will afford the children a sport experience that they find enjoyable and therefore will promote prolonged involvement with skiing. In order to create an enjoyable experience it is important that coaches have an understanding of participation motives of the children and build on them.

Developing Awareness – Why are Children Participating?

The purpose of this activity is to:

1. provide coaches with insight into why each of the children is participating in the program, what they want out of the program, and what their goals are.
2. provide the children with direction and motivation to improve their skiing experience through the process of identifying their goals.

This activity can be set as homework after the first training session and then discussed the next time you meet before you go out onto the snow, during lunch etc.

1. Ask the children to draw a picture that shows what skiing means to them and what they want from skiing – what are their skiing goals, visions, and dreams? (e.g., To make new friends. To learn a new sport. To be the #1 ski racer in the world.) Depending on how you introduce the activity you may want them to draw 2 separate pictures, one illustrating their goals for the current year and another illustrating their dream goals (e.g., in 10-15 years). Encourage the children to explore and represent all aspects of skiing that are important to them (e.g., performance, enjoyment, social, exercise, etc.) and illustrate what they think they need to do in order to achieve them. Tell the children to put these pictures up in their room so they are reminded of why they ski and what they have to do to achieve their goals.
2. During the season you can then use the information the children provided you in these pictures to improve your coaching and coach-athlete relationship. For example,
 - identify specific aspects of skiing that they find enjoyable and build these into training as much as possible (e.g., specific drills, runs, and games)
 - if the children's motivation fades during a training session remind them of their goals and what they want from skiing
 - if children are having a bad day with regards to performance, get them to focus on other aspects of skiing they derive enjoyment from

Positive Thinking

Background for coaches

Positive thinking is the root of confidence, happiness, and excellence in life and sport. Negative thinking is not only detrimental to performance, but it also undermines enjoyment. Often, the only difference between a good and bad run may be to do with what the child was thinking

before the run. Was he feeling confident and aggressive or nervous and tense? Our self-talk, or internal dialogue, can be either beneficial or a hindrance. It can be used in a positive way for:

- *skill learning and correction* – “hands forward”, “wide stance”
- *attention control* – “focus”
- *creating mood/appropriate activation levels* – “relax”, “smooth”
- *source of motivation* – “keep it up”, “let’s make this last one a good one”
- *building self-confidence* – “I can do it”

However, quite often self-talk is negative and should be avoided at all costs. It detracts from the enjoyment of skiing, affects focussing ability, undermines confidence, creates tension, and becomes self-fulfilling. It is especially important at the entry-level that children are encouraged to think in a positive regard at all times. As a coach, you should ensure that you are positive in all your interactions and challenge the children you coach EVERY time they are negative, getting them to replace negative comments with positive ones.

Goals

- **Knowledge** – Children know what self-talk is and that it can be positive or negative
- **Comprehension** – Children understand that the way in which they think can affect their feelings and actions and consequently their performance
- **Application** – Children can use a number of different tools to control their self-talk and have developed a positive perspective towards skiing and life in general

Developing positive thinking

1. Positive self-talk – Everyone talks to themselves, either out loud or silently in their head, when they are performing. Help the children you coach make this a constructive rather than a destructive dialogue. The following are ways in which self-talk can be used positively. Note that there are NO negatives in these cues – use the cue word “calm” rather than “I am not nervous”; “weight forward” rather than “get out the back seat” etc. Help the children find appropriate cue words that work for them. You can write these on tape and stick them on the children’s skis or gloves as reminders.

- *skill learning and correction* – key thoughts that remind the children of the critical parts of the skill (e.g., hands forward, outside ski)
- *attention control* – cue words that focus the children attention onto relevant cues (e.g., gate, rhythm)
- *regulating activation levels* – cue words that will help the children calm down or psych themselves up as needed (e.g., relax, calm, let’s go)
- *source of motivation* – cue words to foster motivation (e.g., I’m doing this for me, keep it up)
- *building self-confidence* – cue words that instil self-belief (e.g., I can do this, I’ve done this before)

2. Highlight training – As a means of helping children develop a positive perspective towards life and skiing, encourage them to identify, record, and discuss their daily highlights. Terry Orlick describes a highlight as *any simple pleasure, little treasure, joy, lift, positive feeling, meaningful experience, magic moment, or anything else that lifts the quality of the day for*

that person. Research has indicated that when individuals spend time thinking about and recording their highlights, they experience more enjoyment and have more positive self-perceptions. Throughout training ask the children what their highlight has been so far, discuss it with them and share highlights with the group. Don't let the children tell you that they haven't had one, encourage them to look for the small highlights that happen every day (e.g., catching snowflakes, a good snack, a nice comment from a team-mate). Look for highlights in all 5 *highlight domains*: human contact; nature; play, physical activity, and sport; personal growth or accomplishment; and sensual experiences. This is a great exercise to do at the end of a training session to ensure the day finishes on a positive note. [See Orlick, 1996, 1998; St. Denis, Orlick, & McCaffrey, 1996 for more information on highlight training]

3. Echo lake – This is an activity to strengthen confidence and self-belief and should be repeated on a regular basis. It can be done at any stage during training (e.g., part way down a run, at the top of the lift, even during free skiing) but may work best if you gather as a group, quieten down, and do a mini-relaxation exercise first. The coach says a number of positive statements one at a time and the children act as the “echo” – whatever the coach says, the children repeat. Examples of positive statements: I feel good, I am happy, I am healthy, I am smart, I am the boss of my body, my body will do what I say, I am good at relaxing, I am special, I am strong, I am good at focussing, I am a good skier, I am a positive person, I am having fun, I can do this drill, I'm going to try my best, I love skiing, etc.
4. Becoming aware of self-talk – Get children to identify their positive and negative self-talk. What kinds of things are they saying to themselves? When are they saying these things? Under what circumstances and in what situations does it occur? Reinforce the positive self-talk and help the children change the negative statements into positive statements. The next exercise, thought stopping, is a great way for children to learn how to change negative self-talk into positive self-talk.
5. Thought stopping – Teach the children to immediately imagine a big red stop sign or a red flashing light or say “STOP” to themselves anytime they say or think something negative. This will interrupt the negative thought. The children should then replace the negative word or phrase with the opposite positive statement. For example, change “I can't do this” to “I can do this”; “I don't want to do this” to “I'm going to give this my best effort”; “I suck” to “I'm going to work hard to get better”.
6. Positive affirmations – This is another activity that will help children see themselves in a more positive manner. Ask each child to write down 5 things they like about themselves and 5 qualities they have as a skier. Get them to post these lists around their house where they will see them several times a day. The more they are seen the more effective they will be. Encourage the children to add pictures, awards, photos etc. to these lists to affirm what they have already achieved. Get the children to learn these lists by heart and recite them frequently. Writing 1 or 2 affirmations on tape and sticking them to skis or gloves will make them even more noticeable. As a coach you may want to develop a routine to the training sessions whereby at the start of each session the group stands in a circle and each child shares a number of items from their list.
7. Positive expectancy – Very often, *what you expect is what you get.* Expectations can lead to feelings of confidence, which will help performance, or they may be perceived as a form of pressure, which will create feelings of anxiety and tension and negatively affect performance.

In order to create positive, performance enhancing expectations, lead the children in appropriate imagery exercises. For example, ask them to recreate feelings and images of previous occasions when they have succeeded. This will help build confidence and can be used to create positive expectations for upcoming performances/skill mastery (see the imagery section for guidance on how to do imagery). Moreover, allow the children opportunities to reflect on the goals they have already achieved and those they are working towards.

8. **Parking** – If children have negative thoughts or worries teach them to “park” them for the duration of a run or training or forever. This activity requires the children to leave or “park” any negative feelings, worries, thoughts, and anxieties while they are performing. Encourage the children to develop their own form of “parking” – they may want to “tree” their feelings (go over to a tree and touch it, leaving all these feelings in the tree) or bury their feelings (dig a hole in the snow at the top of the run and pour in all the negative feelings and then cover them up). By physically going through the actions of “parking”, children will be more likely to leave these feelings behind.
9. **Achievement reminders** – Get the children to create a “treasure box”. Whenever they do something well in training encourage them to write it down or draw a picture of it and put it in their box. They can also include newspaper clippings, race results, photos, highlights etc. Revisiting the contents of their “treasure box” will stimulate feelings of confidence and achievement.

Activation Control

Background for coaches

Activation refers to the physiological activity in the body such as heart rate, respiration rate, muscle tension, adrenaline level. Low levels of activation are characterised by sleep and restfulness, whereas high levels are characterised by high energy and tension. Each child has a zone of activation within which they will perform their best. If their activation level is too low they may become bored and lack motivation. Conversely, if the activation is too high they will experience nervousness and tension. Nerves cause us to contract every muscle in our body instead of just the ones necessary to execute a skill. Consequently, our co-ordination and timing is affected which negatively affects performance. In order to maximise the opportunities for a successful performance, children need to be able to identify their optimum level of activation for performance and then adjust their current level as required.

Goals

- **Knowledge** – Children know what activation is
- **Comprehension** – Children understand that there is an optimum level of activation that they will ski best at and that there are a number of techniques they can use to adjust this level
- **Application** – Children can use appropriate mental training techniques to control their activation level

Developing activation control skills

1. Understanding activation

1.1. Introduce the concept of activation to the children

Useful questions to initiate discussion:

- How do you feel when you are nervous? (focus the discussion on physiological factors e.g., butterflies, muscle tension. Note that everyone will experience it in different ways)
- How do you feel when you are bored/amotivated? (e.g., tired, sleepy, relaxed. Highlight that boredom and nervousness are on opposite ends of the activation continuum)
- What level of activation do you think you would ski best at? (somewhere in-between – emphasise that a certain amount of nervousness is good as it indicates that you are ready to perform)
- How could you increase your activation level if you were bored?
- How could you decrease your activation level if you were nervous?

2. Decreasing activation

2.1. Deep breathing – Find a quiet spot in the lodge or on the hill (if it is not too cold a day) and ask the children to get into a comfortable position. Teach them how to breathe deeply and calm themselves down using the following instructions:

- Close your eyes and start to become aware of your breathing. Don't try and control it, just pay attention as you breathe in and out.
- Now think about breathing in deeply. Try and fill your lungs with as much air as possible.
- Then breathe out slowly and try and empty all the air from your lungs.
- As you keep breathing like this, notice how you feel calmer and more relaxed.

2.2. Regulated breathing – Regulated breathing is just like the deep breathing described above with a slight difference. With regulated breathing, breathe in counting to 4, then breathe out to a count of 8. This will facilitate relaxation.

2.3. Spaghetti toes – This activity is a variation of Progressive Muscle Relaxation adapted by Terry Orlick specifically for children. It is based on the analogy that hard, uncooked spaghetti is like a tense muscle, whereas soft, cooked spaghetti is like a relaxed muscle.

- As with the breathing exercises, Spaghetti Toes should be done in a quiet place with the children in a comfortable position with their eyes closed. The following brief script will help you guide the children through this exercise. Make sure you allow enough time in-between instructions for the children to fully experience what you are asking them to do.
- Before we start teaching our bodies how to relax, let's spend a few moments thinking about spaghetti. Imagine a piece of uncooked spaghetti – it's hard and stiff and easy to snap in two. Now think about what that same piece of spaghetti is like once it is cooked – it's soft and wiggly and won't break in half anymore. Let's see if you can make your body like cooked spaghetti.
 - Start with your toes on one foot. Wiggle your toes. Now ask them to stop wiggling and turn soft and relaxed, just like cooked spaghetti on a plate. Repeat this with the other foot.
 - Repeat these instructions for each of the main parts of the body (e.g., legs, backside, arms, fingers).
 - Now let your whole body go soft and warm like a big plate of spaghetti.

– When you are nervous or worried or scared your body goes like uncooked spaghetti. It's tense and hard and stiff. Next time you feel like this, you can change how your body feels by asking it to go like cooked spaghetti. The more you practice this the better you will get and you can make your body feel warm and relaxed even if you are worried.

3. Increasing activation

3.1. Music – Listening to upbeat music or singing will get children pumped and ready to ski.

3.2. Intense breathing – Just how the regulated breathing described above can decrease activation levels, intense breathing can serve to increase activation levels. Intense breathing means exhaling hard – breathe in for a count of 8 and then out for a count of 4 (note that this is opposite to the regulated breathing for relaxation).

3.3. Physical movement – In order to energise and get pumped up move your body. You can get the children to jump up and down, run up the hill 10-15 metres, swing their arms. You can lead this as a group activity. Stand in a circle and start with the right arm. Shake your right arm, swing it around, keep it moving while you say “my arm is awake, my arm is filled with energy, my arm is ready for action”. Then change arms and repeat the same chant. You can then repeat this with your legs, shoulders, hips, and whole body.

3.4. Cue words – As introduced in the positive thinking section, cue words can be used to control activation. Words and phrases such as “go for it”, “attack”, “hustle” will act to increase the children’s activation levels.

Imagery

Background for coaches

Imagery is the creation, or recreation, of experiences in your mind using *all* of your senses. Imagery is most effective when the images created are vivid, under your control, and include emotion (e.g., pride, satisfaction). There are two sorts of imagery - *internal* and *external*. Imagery from an internal perspective means that you replicate what you see through your own eyes from within your body. Conversely, imagery from an external perspective is like seeing the image on television from outside your body. Although both types of imagery are valuable in their own right, internal imagery is particularly important when learning skills due to its kinaesthetic (movement) value. Besides using imagery to learn or practice skills, it can help build confidence, develop self-belief, foster positive thinking, create positive attitudes and feelings, and control activation. Ski racers often use imagery to help learn a course by going over the course and how they want to ski it in their minds.

Goals

- **Knowledge** – Children know what imagery is
- **Comprehension** – Children understand the different ways imagery can benefit them in performance and life
- **Application** – Children use imagery on a regular basis to aid performance and deal with a variety of situations both in skiing and life

Developing imagery skills

1. Understanding imagery

1.1. Introduce the concept of imagery to the children

Useful questions to initiate discussion:

- What is imagery?
- What kinds of things do you image?
- Why do skiers use imagery?
- How could you use imagery outside of skiing?

By the end of the discussion children should be aware that imagery is just like dreaming. Highlight that any time they have daydreamed (e.g., thinking about skiing during school) they have been doing imagery. Imagery is best when all the senses are used to recreate the experience. Ask them to name the senses (sight, sound, smell, touch, taste, movement). The first few exercises in the next section will guide the children in imagery using each of their senses.

2. Exercises for developing imagery skills

Because imagery is most effective when you are relaxed, it is best if these exercises are done in a quiet place following a brief relaxation exercise such as the ones described above. If time is an issue, start the exercises by asking the children to take a couple of deep breaths and think about feeling calm and relaxed (like cooked spaghetti). The children will find these exercises easier if they sit or lie in a comfortable position with their eyes closed. As you guide the children through these exercises make sure you pause between each request to allow them time to fully experience what you are asking them to do. The exercises in this section should be done in the order they are presented as they increase in difficulty.

2.1. Using the senses

2.1.1. Sight – Imagine that you are at home sitting in your bedroom. Look around you. What do you see? Imagine the colour of the walls. What are some of the pictures and posters you have on the walls? What colour is your comforter? Does it have a pattern on it? What else can you see?

2.1.2. Sound – Imagine the sound of your best friend's voice. What is he or she saying to you? Make your friend whisper, then make him or her shout.

2.1.3. Smell – Imagine the smell of a log fire.

2.1.4. Touch – Imagine the feel of your ski. The soft smooth bottom, the sharp edges, and the knobby bindings.

2.1.5. Taste – Imagine the taste of your favourite snack. Is it sweet or salty?

2.1.6. Movement – Imagine that you are an eagle. Start to flap your wings, feel your wings move up and down as you prepare to take off. As you take off, feel yourself being lifted into the air. Feel the air over your body as you soar in the sky. Imagine how you move with the wind currents and change direction as you please.

2.2. Imagine a relaxing place – Imagine a place that is quiet and where you can relax. Maybe this place is at the top of the mountain on a warm summer day or by a lake. Imagine yourself there feeling comfortable and warm and relaxed. Breathe slowly and imagine breathing any bad feelings or thoughts or tension out of your body. Let your body feel

heavy and relaxed, feel the ground support you. Everything is quiet and you feel calm and happy. In your mind, take a look around this special place you are in. Imagine that it is a bright sunny morning and you can feel the warmth of the sun on your body. The air is clean and fresh. The sky is a beautiful mix of blues, with small wispy white clouds. Everything is calm and you feel peaceful and still. Whenever you feel worried or scared you can come to this place in your mind to relax and get a feeling of calmness. When you open your eyes, you will continue to feel great and look forward to the rest of the day.

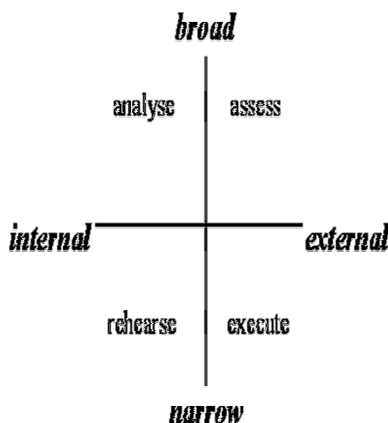
- 2.3. Imaging successful skiing (external perspective) – Ask the children to imagine that you have just video-taped their best run ever. Ask them to watch this tape in their mind. What do they see? As they recreate this experience encourage them to make the image as vivid as possible by using all their senses. What do they look like when they are skiing well? What sound do their skis make on the snow? How do their bodies move as they make each turn? What does it feel like to make these great turns?
- 2.4. Imaging successful skiing (internal perspective) – This activity can be done at the top of a run with the children on their skis (make sure you are on a flat area though!). Ask the children to close their eyes and imagine that they are skiing down their favourite run. Encourage them to do this activity from an internal perspective (i.e., as if they were inside their own body and they would see what they see looking out of their eyes). What can they see? (looking ahead to terrain changes) Hear? (skis on the snow) Feel? (wind on their face). As they make each turn in their mind get them to move their bodies in the correct way too.
- 2.5. Skiing on paper – This is an activity to do in the lodge or at home. Draw a course on a piece of paper and give it to the children to study and learn. Allow them to look at it and trace the correct path with their finger if they wish. After a couple of minutes, ask the children to close their eyes and trace the course with a pencil. See how well they learned the course and how much better they get with practice.
- 2.6. Walking a course – Create a mini-course outside on the flat using ski poles. Allow the children to walk through it with their eyes open and ask them to “learn” the course. Once they feel they have memorised the course get them to walk through it with their eyes closed.

Focusing

Background for coaches

When you tell an athlete to concentrate what *exactly* are you asking them to do? There are different types of concentration, or attentional style, and different tasks require the use of different attentional styles. Consider the type of attention a goalie in soccer needs compared to a golfer just about to execute a shot. The goalie needs to pay attention to the positions of his teammates, the positions of the opposition, his position in relation to the posts, and the ball. On the other hand, the golfer needs to clear their mind and pay attention only to a single swing thought. Good performance is dependent on the ability to identify the attentional focus you need for a given task, get this focus, and then switch from this focus of attention to another as the situation demands – athletes need to be able to focus on the task relevant cues while ignoring distractions. Using the example above, it is easy to see that a golfer will need a much narrower focus of attention than the goalie in order to perform well. There is also another type of difference in the focus required by these two athletes - that is whether their attention is directed internally or externally. As the golfer imagines, or visualises, the shot they want to play, their attention is focused inside their mind. Conversely, as the goalie scans the pitch watching the fast paced action remaining aware of all the players positions, his attention is directed externally. Dr. Robert Nideffer distinguished between 4 types of attentional focus or attentional style (Figure 1):

Figure 1. Attentional styles



Broad-external: generally used to assess a situation

Broad-internal: generally used to analyse and plan your performance strategy

Narrow-external: generally used to execute a specific skill

Narrow-internal: generally used to mentally rehearse (visualise) performance

In ski racing, skiers need a different attentional focus for each aspect of race preparation as well as the race itself (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Attentional demands of ski racing

Attentional Style	Skiing Task	Mental Training Exercise
• broad-external	• course inspection	• listening to all the sounds around you
• broad-internal	• decision making - developing a race plan	• passive thinking - allow thoughts to enter and leave your mind without dwelling on them
• narrow-internal	• visualisation before the race	• focus on your breathing
• narrow-external	• during race – focus on a few gates ahead of you	• focus on a small object e.g., boot buckle, binding, zipper

Goals

- **Knowledge** – Children know the meaning of focus
- **Comprehension** – Children understand the different attentional styles and how these relate to performance
- **Application** – Children can draw from a battery of exercises that will help them improve their focusing ability
 - Children have a basic pre-run routine which contains the key mental skills they have acquired to date

Developing focus

1. Understanding focus

1.1. Determine what the terms concentration and focus mean to the children you are coaching. [before getting on the lift]

Useful questions to initiate discussion:

- What does concentration/focus mean?
- What do you think I mean when I ask you to concentrate/focus?
- Why is concentration/focus important in skiing?
- Why is concentration/focus important in life?
- When do you find it most difficult to concentrate/focus?
- When do you find it easiest to concentrate/focus?

It is important that the children understand good performance is dependent on focusing on relevant performance cues while ignoring distractions

1.2. Help the children identify relevant performance cues and distractions. [while riding the lift]

Following the discussion in 1.1. ask the children to brainstorm for skiing performance cues and distractions. Questions to guide the exercise:

- When do you get distracted when you are skiing?
- When does your mind wander when you are skiing?
- When do you lose your concentration when you are skiing?
- What are the things (i.e., performance cues) that you should be focusing on/paying attention to when you are skiing?

1.3. Introduce the concept of different attentional styles. [at top of lift]

Ask children to share the distractions and performance cues they came up with. After each suggestion ask them whether it is something that is internal (i.e., inside themselves) or external (i.e., in the environment). For example, being worried about crashing would be an internal distraction whereas changes in terrain would be an external performance cue. To make the exercise more practical and fun you could draw a line in the snow, one end representing internal factors, the other external. As each child shares their suggestion, they then go to the appropriate end of the line representing the type of distraction. This can be repeated for distractions and performance cues separately.

Examples of distractions and performance cues:

Distractions	Performance cues
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• People• Fear of crashing• Equipment• Weather	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Terrain• Line• Thinking 'forward'• Visualising technique

Now introduce the idea of having a broad or a narrow focus. This relates to how much information you are attending to. For example, focusing on your boot buckle would require a narrow field of attention, whereas enjoying the view from the top of the mountain would require a broader attention span. Add this line to the internal-external line you already have in the snow and you can now illustrate the 4 attentional styles as depicted in figure 1.

For the rest of the day's training relate each of the skiing drills and training exercises to these attentional styles.

Attentional Style	Drill
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Broad-external	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Broad-internal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Narrow-external	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Narrow-internal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visualise correct technique• Technical cue words

As the children ride up the lift they can further strengthen their focusing skills in each of the different attentional dimensions by using the exercises in Figure 2. Before each ride up the lift select an attentional style for the children to work towards improving and explain the activity to them. Be creative and use other examples in addition to the ones provided so they don't get bored.

2. Exercises for improving focus

2.1. As an entry-level coach, your job is to facilitate the immersion of the children into the activities they are doing. Children need to be fully connected with whatever the given task is at that present moment. The following exercises will provide you with a number of ways you can help children develop their ability to remain focused on one task for a prolonged period of time.

2.1.1. Cloud watching (for warmer, cloudy days) – Find a quiet spot on the hill, lie down, and watch the clouds. Try to find shapes and images and then watch them

change as the clouds move. Children will get totally absorbed in an activity such as this and it is also very relaxing.

2.1.2. Spotting snowballs – Ask each child to make a snowball about the same size as a tennis ball (the more uniform the snowballs, the more difficult the task). Get the children to study their snowball closely for about 15-20 seconds then collect them carefully. While all the children close their eyes arrange the snowballs on the ground and then ask them to find their own snowball again. You can also do this activity with potato chips or certain cereals (e.g., corn flakes, cheerios) over lunch break and then eat the remaining ones afterwards!

2.1.3. Shifting sounds – Gather as a group in a safe spot, partway down a run. Get the children to focus on a constant sound (e.g., wind in the trees, whirr of the lift, sound of snow makers) then ask them to shift their focus from this sound to another (e.g., a skier skiing past them). Ask them to follow this skier down the hill in their mind and when they can't hear them any longer return their focus to the original sound. Alternatively, ask the children to switch between the sounds every 15-20 seconds. You can also ask the children to switch between using different senses. For example, shift from sounds to sights (e.g., bark of a tree, pattern of snow) and back to sounds again.

2.1.4. Focusing on the move – While skiing ask the children to focus on the sound of their skis and how the sound changes as they make their turns. Then ask them to switch their focus to the feel of their legs, then the feel of their arms, to the sound of their breathing, to their internal voice saying “smooth, relaxed”.

2.2. Attentional cues – Use attentional cues to ensure a process focus rather than an outcome focus. How do the children want to feel (e.g., happy), act (e.g., confident), and ski (e.g., technically correct)? Encourage the children to identify cues that will prompt these things. The cues may be visual, verbal, or physical. Below are some examples, but let the children come up with their own, as then they will be more meaningful. Before each run encourage the children to attend to this cue before they start skiing so it starts to become routine for them.

2.2.1. Visual – image of correct technique, image of a lion at the top of the course signifying courage, image of cottage in the country which is relaxing

2.2.2. Verbal – technical cue words (e.g., fast, smooth, forward), a phrase or a line from a favourite song which gets you psyched to ski

2.2.3. Physical – tapping poles together, adjusting goggles (physical cues should act as a trigger to get into the appropriate mind-set)

2.3. *You can't force focus. Focusing in effortless* – It is very difficult to maintain an appropriate focus if you are feeling tense or nervous. Use of the relaxation techniques already discussed may be a necessary precursor to refocusing techniques. The easiest way to refocus after a distraction is to take a deep breath and then use a focus cue to regain focus. Encourage the children to take a deep breath before attending to their attentional cue as described on 2.2.

2.4. Develop routines – In order to ensure that children are focussed before each run, they should develop a simple pre-run routine. As they get older and start racing more, the pre-run/pre-race routine becomes much more important and more complex, yet there is still great value for this age group to start developing a SIMPLE routine. A good basis for the routine would be the deep breath and attentional cues as discussed above in 2.3. As the child progresses, they may want to include simple imagery, something to create/reinforce a positive attitude, and activation control as well as behavioural components (e.g., jumping up and down, stretching neck muscles). The children may need you to provide them with a basic template but then allow them to personalise their own routines. The importance of keeping it simple cannot be overstated. Once the children have developed their routines, they need to be ingrained and used before each and every run.

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