

## Proper Parent Protocol

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by Amy Cheney-Seymour

Congratulations. Your child participates in Nordic skiing. Wow, they made it to Junior Nationals, bravo!

How is your self-esteem?

That bad? Not surprising since unless you are part of the 1% of happy parents, your child is pretty much disgruntled, distant and disinterested in you. If you are not a one percenter, she or he hasn't hugged you after a ski race since the age of six. Instead she or he complains, or swears when results are not as she or he *imagined*. Stop the madness, join the 1% of duck parents, who let results and emotional turbulence roll off their back.

### Scenario:

Race day, 7 am. You are a short order cook. You would do anything to assist his nutritional performance. You spend an hour whipping organic free range happy hen eggs into a frenzy, pouring your homemade maple syrup on the multi-grain waffles you carefully kept warm, not dried out. Skillfully browned organic turkey bacon, from farms where the turkey's die of old age is on the platter. Cut fruit. A candle. Ta-dah! Enter your cherub, who sits down, grunts, and takes out a yogurt from the fridge. You urge the steaming plate forward, on the place mat, next to the sparkling orange juice. He hastily eats the yogurt, leaves the dirty spoon in the cup, and begins the treasure hunt for his suit, socks, wind briefs. You feed the pancakes to the dog.

A week ago the child decided she need energy gel. A specific energy gel that helps her propel tirelessly forward. All natural energy gel that friend Henry says is the best. You like Henry. You like all natural. It's a victory. You commit yourself to finding this energy gel, which does not exist in stores, but the all mighty Amazon sends it right along. It arrives with cardboard fanfare and you present the gels to your child, on race morning, with an expectant air of, well, expecting a *thank you*. Your child grumbles, thumbs through them and asks if they have strawberry-kiwi-mango-lime because that is her new favorite flavor as of one hour ago. She sighs, shut the box and wanders away. Your happy morning further crumbles. You do the dishes, pack the lunch.

Upon departure you notice the child has forgotten the water bottle, energy gel, and gloves, *your* new gloves she requisitioned without a so much as by your leave. These items go into the Parents Emergency Back Pack, which contains enough food for a week, surgical kit, an array of clothing for weather from -10 to 50 and raining, nine feet of ribbons, twenty pounds of wax, an iron, a portable wax table and cowbells.

In the car you realize you forgot to eat your own breakfast and only had three gulps of tea.

As the child is in the zone, you let him plug in and listen to music. He doesn't like your music. He is sick of you playing Pearl Jam in the car *every day*. This is against car rules, but you want happy. So you let him plug in noticing on his phone that *Given to Fly* is currently playing. You say nothing, you say nothing, because you want harmony.

You experience this happy moment at drop off. Someone else can deal with your cantankerous brat, a brat you love, but one who is grating on your nerves. Your child has a literal team of coaches to wax, urge, prep and direct his or her efforts. "Goodbye, honey. Good Luck." Grunt.

**You should** wander down the hill, grab a cup of coffee and enjoy the scenery. You should chat with friends about your similar morning spent with an ingrate. You do not do this. You do not do this, because you do not understand **Proper Parent Protocol**. You don't put your oxygen mask on first. You miss the fleeting moment of solitude, instead you hover.

Admit it. Come on. I do it, I hover too.

Maybe you are a patient hoverer. You wait the appropriate 20 yards away trying to catch a glimpse of him so you can hand over the forgotten water, energy gel, and gloves (I barge right over. After 20 years of this skiing gig, I have no patience.) When you try and hand the forgotten items over, he doesn't *want the gel*, but take the gloves and the water, and hurriedly commits himself single-mindedly to the pre-race anxiety routine (PRA). PRA consists of pacing, leg swinging, changing head bands, braiding, unbraiding, and changes of hat, sunglasses and gloves. This can also include ski changes, including insisting the un-waxed skis are faster (which are not faster, and you will also pay for this poor choice later in the car ride home). They may decide that 20 degrees is balmy, and to wear just a bib, or a bib and a jog bra. When you mention it is a bit nippy for such scantily foolhardy wardrobe changes, he glares at you like you are a very bad or very stupid person. You are not bad or stupid, but you are the person who will be nursing him back to health in a week.

Now, feeling injured and unappreciated, you saunter down for that cup of tea, your heart weeping on your sleeve.

You stand in line for that tea, squishing the energy gel back and forth in your pocket, sick to your stomach. You recognize you are anxious. Why? Your child has successfully transferred their angst to you. You are stress sponge at saturation point.

Where do you put his nervous energy? You manifest into Crazy Ski Parent. Own it, go ahead, choose from the following:

**All knowing:** You know too much. Former coach, former ski racer, former super star. Every subtle nuance of the race day is weighing you down like retro doc martens. You're worried about the kick, or the glide, or ski. Have they double poled enough? Did they peak at the right time? You have checked the relative humidity, the humidity of the snow, the wind, angle of the sun, migratory patterns of native birds and placed all these factors into a mind bending Nordic skier algorithm that Will Hunting can't solve.

**The Organizer:** You know all the players. You have a spreadsheet of all racers on your child's team, what their average time is for each distance and discipline as well as their projected success on in varying conditions. You have told your child where he or she should finish. You spend hours collaborating the information after each race, in a color coded chart which you explain, at length, to your bored child. You play it super cool at the event, but you home crunching numbers until the wee hours.

NOTE: Danger Ahead

**The Cheerleader:** Woo hoo! Race time! You wear out three cow bells a season. As your child comes by, in Banshee like screech, you yodel the obvious statements such as:

a) Faster! Faster! Faster!

b) They are catching you!

c) You are \_\_\_\_ (insert random number) seconds out of \_\_\_\_ place.

Or you run uphill, screaming incoherent instructions. I asked a real, live ski racer if he heard his parents yelling. “No, I tune them out.” Honestly, you're gonna pull a hamstring. Tone it down. You are embarrassing me.

**Super Parent:** Food and party person, yup you're the planner! You organize the food table, bring hot coffee to coaches, and spend hours creating the right atmosphere so the skiers have yummy food after the race. You bake individual cupcakes for the gluten free, dairy free and sugar free. The names of each skier is on the cupcake. You organize purchasing team hats and off season trips. You were going to send your child to college, but you just dropped \$200 on oranges, banana bread and 7 crock pot dinners.

**The Parent Coach:** You didn't ski race, but you were an athlete back in the day, and have a background in coaching. You spend hours creating analogies that will “sink” into your child's brain. You create a mediation schedule, and a nightly visualization planner that are both ignored. You refer to these things often when your child is ensconced in the aforementioned pre-race anxiety routine (PRA). You arrange the salt and pepper shakers at breakfast to display proper drafting technique, with the forgotten maple syrup acting as a sharp corner, the crumpled napkin is the tuck. See how low it is, the napkin hand just in front of it's napkin-like-body, but not out so far it is scooping in air and causing resistance. See? Are you listening?

Author's Note: *Guilty as Charged*

Join the One Percent. The club is free. It is quick to join and there are no dues. Everyone will be happier if you join, but I warn you, it ain't easy, but it is simple. Let your child grow up. Follow the protocol.

### **Walk Like a Duck**

Become impervious to the drama.

*Proper Parent Protocol* has rules:

1. You cannot make your child happy.
2. Let it go.
3. Have fun.
4. Repeat #1

That is it. Welcome!

Let it go. Let it all go, the sleep, and wax and their time and just let your child own it. Ignore their habitual bitching, the complaints about why their crumpled, wet suit they left in a backpack didn't get washed. Give them a map to the laundry room.

Continue the routine. Buy the food. Fold some clothes. Shake the cowbell. Remind yourself that your child is healthy and able to compete and the centrifuge of emotions involved in sport, puberty and life is a whirling you cannot control.

Ultimately you got into this mess because you want your child to be happy. You cannot make them happy, but you can get real. Set real expectations. If your son made it to JN's by the newly sprouted hair on his chin, remind him he is 15 and he will probably not win the sprint final if he was 29th in qualifications. This is ok.

If your daughter is more concerned with her hair ribbons than her V2 on flagpole hill, buy her matching sparkles and celebrate her hard work that got her to this point. A glass slipper might not be in her future. This is also ok.

While you're getting real with your child, get real with you. Make breakfast and leave the kitchen. Leave the gel on the table. Let them fall a little and forget a lot, so they become responsible. Finish your tea and take the dog for a walk and let them wash their own clothes.

Set some boundaries. While you are letting it go, let yourself have fun. Enjoy this fleeting time with your child, and try not to internalize his or her mood swings lest you be in traction. Plan something fun for after the race, and for the love of Skade, don't bring his or her results up unless they do. Be grateful they are dedicated to sport that requires them to put themselves on the line and they are surrounded by a really great community.

Finally, when they do come to you, panicked 14 minutes before start time asking for that energy gel they left on the table and didn't want an hour ago don't take it personal. This is not a time to lecture. Hand it over, say "have fun" and waddle away.

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