

FEIS 101

What is a feis?

Feis (pronounced 'fesh') is Gaelic for 'festival'. A feis is a gathering for competition in various aspects of Irish culture like dancing, music, art, and soda bread making. Feisanna (plural of feis) provide an opportunity for your dancer to compete against others in the same age group and level. For your dancer, this is a fun and exciting occasion. For a "feis parent", the experience can be very overwhelming! Following is some information to help make the event a little less stressful!

Where are there feisanna and how do I register my dancer(s)?

Throughout the year, there will be many opportunities for your dancer to attend a feis. A complete list of all US feisanna for the year can be found on the North American Feis Commission's website (http://www.northamericanfeiscommission.org/2010_Schedule.html). There are links on the left hand side of the page to sort by date, region or feis name. In 2009, a new 'service' also became available at www.feis411.com. Though there is a \$20 annual fee, the website has everything in one central location; feis dates, syllabi, registration links, hotel information and post-feis results. With enough searching, however, most of this information can be found on your own on the internet, so the choice to pay for this convenience is entirely yours.

Each feis will post a syllabus, typically 2 to 3 months in advance, where you'll find all of the information you need to register your dancer. Some feisanna choose to have you mail in your entry. Others use websites designed to register competitors for feisanna (www.efeis.com, www.feisweb.com). Either way, please be sure to check with your dancer's instructor first to confirm which dances he or she should register for.

What are the competition categories?

You will see on the feis syllabus that dance categories are broken down in to age group and skill level. Your dancer's age to register is what he or she is on January 1 of each year. If your dancer is 7 years old on January 1, he or she will dance in the Under 8 category for the entire year (even after his or her birthday passes). Competition levels are: Beginner, Advanced Beginner, Novice, Prizewinner, Preliminary Championship and Open Championship. Again, please check with your dancer's instructor first to confirm the level at which your child(ren) should be dancing.

OK, we're all signed up, now what?

A few days prior to the feis, you should check online for the stage schedule. This can usually be found on the hosting school's website, and is linked through the Feis411 information website, as well. Although you can sometimes get a copy at the feis, it's a good idea to print one out, just in case! A copy of the syllabus can be helpful too, in case you forget the competition number(s) that you've registered your dancer for! This is also a good time to gather any maps and directions.

Tomorrow is feis day!

Truth be told, feisanna can sometimes feel like organized chaos. Being properly prepared can help everyone enjoy the experience. Packing your 'feis bag' the night before can go a long way in the morning! Here are some things that you should consider including:

- dance shoes (don't laugh...it's happened!)
- poodle socks
- dance uniform (school dress or blouse and skirt, bloomers)
- money (for vendors and entry fee, if there is one)
- wig (if wearing one)

- hair fixings - comb/brush, rubber bands, bobby pins
- safety pins
- sock glue / tape
- water bottle and a nutritious snack
- a pencil/pen and highlighter, to mark your stage schedule
- first aid items (band-aids, pain meds)
- travel pack of tissues
- a book or activity to help pass the time between dances or results postings

The BIG DAY is here!

Grab your patience as you head out the door and plan to arrive at the venue early - at least 30-60 minutes prior to the anticipated start time of your competitions. Upon your arrival, find the registration table. Some feisanna mail or email the dancer's competitor number in advance. If this isn't the case, you can get your competitor number at the registration table. **Hold on to this card!** Your dancer will need to wear it and can't compete without it!

IMPORTANT NOTE...A competitor number is different than a competition number. Each dancer has a *competitor number*, which the judge uses to distinguish your dancer from another. The *competition number* corresponds to each specific dance (i.e. - Under 7 Reel).

Once you're all 'checked in', find a place to settle in and get organized. Take a deep breath - this is where your day is going to start to get a little crazy! Take a few minutes to walk around and familiarize yourself with the layout of the stages. Make mental note of the stages that your dancer will be on. Keep in mind that your dancer may be on several different stages. Make sure to visit the restroom. If hair isn't done or your dancer isn't dressed for competition, this is the time to do it. For girls, hair can either be neatly pulled back or put in a bun wig. Don't forget to attach your dancer's competitor number at the waist, by safety pin or with a thin ribbon. Make sure dance shoes are double knotted, because laces have been known to come undone mid-dance. It's time to move on to the first stage!

Let the dancing begin!

Competition numbers are typically listed in order on a big sign next to the assigned stage. As each dance is completed, it is crossed out. Sometimes you'll also see a sign with 'now dancing' and 'next'. It is very important to pay attention to these signs. Unfortunately, competitions will not wait for missing dancers and stages can move at different paces based on the number of competitors in each dance. However, if you found that you've missed your dance, don't panic! Speak with the stage manager to see if they will allow you to dance separately. When your dancer's competition is second up to dance, it's time to check in at the stage. At this time, it can be reassuring to your dancer to remind them - 'this is the stage for your reel competition - this is where you'll be dancing your reel steps'. "Drop off" your dancer and find a spot to watch your dancer shine!

The stage monitor will have a list of dancers in each competition and will check your dancer's card against the list. The dancers will be lined up and, when it is time to dance, they'll be lead out on to the rear of the stage in a straight line. A stage helper will assist dancers with when to move forward, when to start dancing, and remind them to bow to the judge (adjudicator) at the end. Dance choreography is different for each school, so don't be surprised when you see other dancers doing different steps. At the end of the dance, the dancers are led off stage and it's time to find your dancers next competition! Occasionally you'll find that all dances for one age group are run consecutively on the same stage. If this is the case, they often just keep them lined up for the next dance.

Some reminders for your dancer.

- RELAX! Smile and have a good time! The most important thing is to HAVE FUN!
- Try to look as confident as possible walking onto the stage. Walk onto the stage with your feet crossed, one in front of the other - head held high and a big smile!
- When it's your turn to compete, step forward and to your left with your feet crossed one in front of the other. Remember to point your toe on the 5-7th beat and get up onto your tippy toes on the 8th beat. (Don't worry, they've learned this in class).
- Eye contact with the judge is important. This shows that you're confident.
- Even if your shoe falls off or your wig starts shift - KEEP DANCING! If you feel that you cannot keep dancing, bow, gather your shoe/wig and return to the line.
- The same goes for slipping / falling down. If you can, get up and keep dancing. If not, bow to the adjudicator and return to the line.
- When you're done, make sure you're facing the judge. Give a nice, deep bow with a great big SMILE. Walk back to the line with your feet crossed also and rigid arms.
- It is important to remain focused and not talk while standing in line, both before and after you dance. The adjudicator is evaluating dancers from the moment they walk on until they are off of the stage.

Waiting for results...

Throughout the day, volunteers will gather the judge's envelopes and deliver them to the tabulation room to be processed. Somewhere within the venue will be a big wall where the results will be posted. Anywhere from a half hour to several hours later, the competitor numbers for 1st, 2nd and 3rd place will be listed next to the competition number on the results wall. If your dancer's number is in one of these boxes, congratulations! Your next stop is the awards table! You will need the competitor number in order to collect any medals that have been won. If not, take the time to remind your dancer that just getting up there to dance was quite an accomplishment!

Some adjudicators will make quick comments while watching each dance - these are called "marks". Depending on the feis, these are either emailed to you a few days after the feis, or there will be a place that you can collect these. It is very helpful to the dance instructors to see these comments, so they know what to work on with your dancer. If possible, hand in a copy at the next class.

~ * ~ * ~ * ~ CONGRATULATIONS - YOU'VE SURVIVED A FEIS! ~ * ~ * ~ * ~

A few miscellaneous 'things to know'.

- If your child really doesn't want to dance - don't push it. There is no penalty for a 'no show' and these are actually not uncommon.
- If you're confused or have any questions, find a volunteer. That's what they're there for!
- Do not approach adjudicators or musicians. While at a stage, all questions should be directed at the stage monitor.
- No photography - still or video - is allowed during competition. Photos should be taken before or after your dancer is/was on stage, and not while anyone is dancing.
- The Teelin School of Irish Dance has put together a 'first feis picture story' which is a great pre-feis tutorial for parents and dancers alike - www.teelin.com/firstfeis. Definitely worth the time to look at!

GOOD LUCK AND HAVE FUN!