

Your first Feis! (pronounced fesh like fresh without the R!)

So your child tells you they are going to "feis" - You don't know whether to run them to the nearest bathroom or call a Psychologist!

Actually feis is a Gaelic word for competition. But more importantly that also means your dancer is good enough to represent The Hagen School of Irish Dance in competition, congratulations!

What is a Feis? A feis is a chance for your child to compete against other dancers in their age group and level. It builds their confidence, gives them a chance to showcase what they've learned and it's a lot of fun.

These are six levels -

Beginner

Advanced Beginner

Novice

Prizewinner

Preliminary Championship

Open Championship

Each level has an age category and up until Preliminary boys and girls dance separately.

Where is a Feis and what do I do? There are local Feisanna (plural of Feis) right here on Long Island and there are many a bit further away. Most schools sponsor a feis so there are lots to choose from. The Hagen Feis is the first Saturday in March each year.

Can I find where they are taking place on the web? To look up where they are and how to get there you can go to Peter Smith (a step dancing school) website at www.petersmithschool.com and hit Feis Info. This will give you a lay out of which ones are coming up and when the entry is due (there is always a cut off date). The official website for the NAFC site also includes all feisanna for the year and overseas competitions: (we will provide a new one when 2006 calendar is set.

<http://www.northamericanfeiscommission.org/2005.asp>

Or you can ask your teacher for a "syllabus". It's a flyer giving you all the information you need to enter a feis. It's pronounced silabus.

How do I know what competition number to enter my child in?

Your teacher will tell you what competition to enter. You will soon catch on and be able to do this yourself. You start at Beginner and your teacher will tell you when to advance to the next level. Your teacher will also tell you which dance your child should enter.

They compete according to age? Yes, they compete with children their own age. It goes by "Under 8, Under 9, Under 10" etc. for each level. The first day of the year is the cutoff date. So if your child is 8 and they were born in March they dance "under 8". A child born in November would also be "under 8". Rules are specified in the Syllabus.

Again, your teacher can help you with this at first. You'll be surprised how easy it gets once you get going. Your child will probably be told to enter a few dances. Reel/jig/slip jig/hard jig. You pay for each dance your child is entered. A dance is usually \$5 or \$6.

Here's a tip - They all ask that you enter your child on a 3x5 index card. Name, age, date of birth, address, telephone number, email address, school/teacher.

Type this information up on labels (on your computer) and then put the label on each index card as you enter a feis. At the bottom of the index card just write in what competition they are entering. This way you never forget any valuable information needed and it's easy for them read. Mail in the index card with the information and a check and you're done.

Keep a folder with the index cards, labels and envelopes all inside. When you sit down to enter your child in a feis, everything you need is right there. You can also write the name of the feis on the outside of the folder and the date you mailed the entry. You can also keep directions and notes on the feis in the folder for next time you go to that particular feis.

Okay so now you've entered and it's time to go....

What do I need to bring?

- School blouse and skirt (see your teacher for details)
- Bloomers (lollipops)
- Bubble sox (you can buy these at the dance studio)
- Sox glue (this helps the sox from falling down! It's sold at the feis)
- A number card holder (it's plastic and has a ribbon that ties around their waste)
- Dancing shoes
- Curly hair if possible!

It's a good idea for you to have a little check list for yourself handy to go over the things you will bring since it can be stressful in the morning.

YOU GET TO THE FEIS -

How early to I need to get there? If the feis states that it is starting at 9am you should try to be there by 8:15. (They all start at different times so pay attention to the syllabus.) You need to do a few things before they dance and you want your child to be totally comfortable and ready to go.

Is the feis free to the public? No, you must pay (usually \$10) to enter. Children are usually free as are the dancers.

Where do I get my child's competition number? A lot of the feisanna will mail your number (some ask for a self addressed stamped envelope) or it may come as a postcard. (Don't throw it out! It will be the size of a large index card and have numbers on one side). If you do not get one in the mail there will be a sign telling you where to pick up your number. They are usually in alphabetical order according to school (not your last name) so look for yours on the "H" line.

Where do I go once I have the competition number? Once you have your number you go to your dance area. This is usually in a gym with many

competitions going on at the same time. This can be overwhelming ~ ask around, people are usually friendly at a feis... and stay calm. Imagine what your little one is thinking and they can't even see over all the heads!

The stages are roped off and there is a list of the competition numbers near each stage. A competition is crossed off once the competition starts.

How do they know my child is here? You must check your child in with the person running that stage area. They will cross off the competition number on your child's entry number.

You will notice that the dancers walk out in a straight line and then dance two at a time. Your teacher will go over this with your child ahead of time. The judge sits facing the dancers and there is someone there to tell them when to start. There will be a musician or two playing for each stage.

You need to make sure those shoes are tied and your child is calm. It's not unlikely that they panic and tell you they don't remember what dance they are doing etc. The people working at your stage area will help you figure this out. They are very helpful and understanding.

What happens after they dance? After they dance the first dance they move to the next stage for their second dance - and so on. Since they are all the same age and most likely all doing the same dances they will all move to the next stage.

How do I find out how my child did? After about an hour (approximately) you will walk over to where they have "results" listed on a wall. This is usually in a hallway. You look at the competition numbers on the wall and wait for them to fill in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd place winners.

What if my child's number is listed on the wall? If your child's number is in one of the boxes Congratulations! That means your child placed and he/she (usually) gets a medal! It's very exciting. You then look for a sign (and a line!) for Marks. Be sure to bring your marks to your next class.

What if my child's number is not listed on the wall? If not, you reassure them how great they did and then go to marks. There will be a sign telling

you where to pick up marks. If you can't find it just ask. This will tell you how they scored. Bring that paper with you to the next dance class and show your teacher. This is helpful for them should the judge write a helpful comment.

As your child moves up in category they will become more experienced in the whole "feis world!"

Soon you might think of getting the wig or bun cover. This eliminates sleeping on curlers and fussing with the hair. My daughter found it so much easier popping on the wig then sleeping in curlers and tossing and turning all night.

When your child reaches Prizewinner you might want to consider a solo dress. Your teacher will guide you through this process.