

PARENTS' GUIDE TO SNOWSPORTS

One of the most beneficial and lasting gifts you can share with your family is to get them involved in snowsports. When children and adults go skiing or snowboarding, they're engaging in a healthy activity that can help them build confidence, develop coordination, appreciate the outdoor environment, and experience sheer joy! Thanks to recent innovations in equipment combined with the invaluable benefits of instruction, learning to ride has never been easier...or more fun!

Virtually every snowsports center in the country offers individual or group instruction led by professional snowsports educators who customize their training based on the student's skill level, age, and physical ability, among other factors. This question-and-answer format contains helpful tips on how to make lesson experiences memorable and enjoyable for everyone.

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All About Lessons

Planning Your Visit

What to do When You Arrive

Helpful Websites

Quick Questions For the Trip

ALL ABOUT LESSONS

What kinds of questions should I ask when I call the school?

The more you find out about the program in advance, the more you can help your child know what to expect from the experience. You can also print the "Quick Questions" form at the end of this document to keep track of the answers. Here's some things you may want to ask:

- What types of programs do you offer?
- Does your snowsports school have a daycare service? (Some areas offer a daycare/sports school combination program.)
- Are both group and private lessons offered? If so, what is the cost for each?
- How many children are in a lesson together?
- When are the lesson meeting times?
- What are the lesson prices? (Children's lesson pricing is likely to be different from an adult's. Depending on the school, teenagers may be included with either children's or adult lessons.)
- What is included with the lesson pricing and what is extra? (Lift tickets, lunch, rental equipment, etc.)
- Do you offer any special package deals? (These might include a discount for more than one day in the school.)
- What do I need to bring for my child?
- What if my child doesn't ride when the lesson is over? Are there other activities he or she can do?

How do I know it is a quality snowsports school?

Ultimately, whether you plan to visit a major destination center or a small area close to home, be sure to choose an area that offers instructional programs led by experienced, qualified ski and snowboard instructors. Professional instruction is the key to greater enjoyment and progress. You are likely to find instructors who belong to a number of organizations who support professional training. Members certified by the largest of these national organizations, the Professional Ski Instructors of America (PSIA) and/or the American Association of Snowboard Instructors (AASI) are trained in customer service skills, riding mechanics, and learning theory. Some PSIA and AASI instructors hold specialized accreditation in children's instruction. Above all, they are committed to helping you and your children have fun!

Consistency is important to children. They prefer to continue with someone they like. Good instructors are popular, so make your

reservations early and perhaps choose a couple of instructors your child will enjoy.

What is the best age for children to ride?

All children develop emotionally, physically, and mentally at different rates. If you feel your child will tolerate being away from you for the duration of the lesson, will be comfortable with the surroundings, and can use the bathroom on his or her own, it's time to look into snowsports schools. With that in mind, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is your child comfortable being around adults? Can she communicate with them?
- Does she tend to experience separation anxiety?
- Does she go to daycare or play groups?
- Does your child play with others and share?
- Is she "potty trained" and able to use the bathroom facilities independently?
- Has your child been exposed to snow and winter conditions?

The answers to these questions will help you determine whether your child is ready and willing to take lessons. These factors will also help you determine whether he or she—along with the other children in the program and the instructional staff—will have a good experience.

Skiing: Many snowsports schools offer lessons for children beginning at the age of three or four. The programs can vary from one-hour private lessons to all-day group lessons. The all-day programs are usually designed to combine on-snow time and indoor time. Some even provide lunch and access to rest areas for short periods; even so, they should not be considered a daycare. It is important that your child is old enough for the program. One year can make a significant difference in the developmental skills necessary for certain activities.

Snowboarding: Areas tend to offer snowboarding lessons for children who are a bit older—around six or seven. Appropriately sized equipment for younger children may be limited at the area you choose, so be sure to ask about availability and make any suggested reservations ahead of time. Results tend to be better for older children because of their higher developmental stage. Many experts agree that before age six, children tend to find snowboarding difficult for their little legs. Because snowboarding engages so many small, less-developed muscles, it can be a bit frustrating for young children. Many areas recommend starting children on skis first, perhaps even nordic skis, so they can learn balance, stance, and gliding on two

planks rather than one. Once the child develops a sense of these movements—and a good dose of confidence—the chances of success on a snowboard can increase tremendously.

Can I pre-register my child for ski/snowboard school?

It depends on the area. Some areas will allow you to pre-register. If this is an option, make sure to do it! It will save you time when you get to the area. Otherwise, plan to arrive early enough to guarantee your child gets in.

How early do we need to get there before the lesson?

You can't be too early, especially if you have to do the ticket/equipment/lesson sign-up dance at different stations. Even if you *are* pre-registered, it may take some time to check in and get your child fitted for equipment, so plan your arrival 1 ½ hours or more before the lesson starts so you won't be rushed. Here are typically the things that you will need to do before your child even starts his day:

- Wake up
- Dress in winter clothes (this can be a challenge if you and your child are new to skiing)
- Eat breakfast
- Drive, walk, or shuttle to the area
- Rent equipment, if needed (this will probably take at least an hour or more)
- Walk to the snowsports school (this will also take a bit longer due to walking in boots, especially for beginners)
- Fill out paperwork and sign child in to school
- Drop off child

Will my child enjoy a group lesson?

Lessons range in length anywhere from half an hour up to all day. Children may not feel as conspicuous when they're with others who are also struggling to learn and many times they end up making a special friend. Consider these questions about your child:

- Does he like being around other kids?
- Does he need personal attention?
- How long can he really stand in the cold on skis or a snowboard before a meltdown starts to happen?

Be fair to your child. If your child has a good vacation, so will you. If your child is sick, tired, and crabby, you will suffer, too.

Would my child prefer a private lesson?

If you decide that a private lesson suits your needs and your budget, you can request a specific instructor or type of lesson. For example: "My daughter wants to ride with a female instructor who is very fun and energetic." Most resorts will try to accommodate your request, particularly in private lessons. If your child and the instructor click, you can always ask for the same instructor in the future. Ask yourself these questions:

- Does your child prefer personal, one-on-one attention?
- Do you imagine a situation in which your child may want more flexible scheduling or pacing than might be available in a group lesson?

Should I consider booking a family lesson?

If your family has a set goal of riding together with an instructor consult with the booking agent or instructor about the possibility of structuring a lesson whereby the family can ski as a group and interact with each other. Some areas even offer private lessons for younger children and one parent that are geared toward teaching the adult how to ride with their younger child.

Before you decide to book a family private lesson, keep in mind that the instructor will normally teach to the lowest level in the group. Someone in your family who may ride at a much higher level is likely to be bored. Kids and adults learn at different rates and find different things fun. It may be a better idea to match like abilities and ages and everyone will have something awesome to talk about at the end of the day when you reunite.

What level group should I put my child in?

For a first lesson, this is obvious. For return visits, you have several factors to consider. The person who takes your registration for the snowsports school may be able to guide you a little but it is best to talk with an instructor when you arrive. Here are some of the questions you might be asked:

- What was your child doing on skis/snowboard the last time?
- What was the terrain like?
- What did her last instructor say to do next?

Prepare your child for the idea of being shifted to another class so she won't feel she hasn't performed well. You want her to be in the class where she will have the most fun.

Many areas have a “hang tag” or “report card” where instructors can check off what children worked on or learned. This is a good item to save for your child’s next lesson since it can serve as a guide to place your child in the correct class in the future.

Keep in mind that your child may have grown or had changes in coordination since the last snowsports lesson. Start out easy at the beginning of the season. You wouldn’t want your child to get discouraged if all the muscles don’t remember all the moves. Consider snow conditions, too: heavy slush, deep powder, and ice are much more difficult than new, packed powder and this may mean your child will need to drop down a level to have fun.

My child has attention deficit disorder or another special need. Is there anything we need to do differently?

Your child may learn well in a typical class situation or might do best in a private lesson. Ask the booking agent if the snowsports area has a special program that addresses the needs of your child and has instructors specifically trained to work with him or her. If you do register your child for a typical class, give the instructor all of the necessary information about your child’s abilities and challenges, including behavior, so that everyone can have a fun and successful lesson.

Release and Liability Forms

Paperwork, paperwork, *paperwork!* It’s everywhere you go: at work, at home, and even when you are on vacation. Make sure as you fill forms out that you understand the risks you are taking when sending your child out on the mountain. Skiing and snowboarding are sports with risk and your child needs to know he or she is responsible for his or her own actions on the mountain and he needs to be aware of others on the mountain. Talk to your child about *Your Responsibility Code* (you can find the Responsibility Code on many trail maps and at the NSAA website).

Claim Forms

Some schools require you to show proof of identity or turn in a special form to pick up your child. Be sure to add names/signatures of every adult who is authorized to pick up your child in case you are unable to arrive on time for pick-up. Keep in mind how important that paperwork is. Put it in a safe place and be sure the person picking up has it. The instructors do not necessarily know who you are and will not be able to

remember every parent. If mom drops off and dad picks up there is no way to tell if that child is going with the correct person unless there is a claim system. These systems are for the safety of your child and if you don't have the correct paperwork, it may take you a bit longer at pick-up time. The best thing to do is to know the system and be prepared.

What should I expect from my child's lesson?

The most important thing is for your child to have fun and want to participate again. Younger children may have a hard time adjusting at first, especially if they have never been in snow before. They may or may not want to try and that needs to be okay.

Older children are usually more ready to participate and will at least try. The main thing to remember is you want your child to have fun and stay safe. If your child learns some things too, that is an added bonus. This is a vacation, not a preparation for the Olympics in 2020.

What will my child learn?

Depending on which lesson your child is in and how long the lesson is, your child may learn different things. A young first-timer (never ever skied or snowboarded before) may learn how to put on equipment, stand, balance, walk, get up, and glide. A second-timer young child may still be working on stopping and may take three to four days to be ready to ride a chairlift.

Older kids may do all of this, plus stop, turn, and perhaps ride a lift, depending on the length of the lesson. Older children will typically continue to perfect what they have learned. Also, they can work on turning, speed control, and riding on slightly more challenging terrain.

When you do decide to head to the mountains and try snowsports, remember the number one thing that kids should be able to do is **have fun**. Skiing and snowboarding can be very physically demanding sports for some, even though it's second nature for others. Fun may mean sliding around for 10 minutes to an hour and spending the rest of the time making a snowman or sledding. Children who are fairly athletic and experienced with other sports may end up sliding the entire day and at the end of class, beg for more. Both of these situations are normal—pace and activity choice varies widely.

Each child learns at a different pace. Be sure you understand your child's skill level and how this fits into the lesson system. This may vary from one snowsports school to another. Check the "report card" or ask your child's instructor for a recommendation for the next class. Find out what trails are comfortable and fun for your child, as

well as those which might be a bit too challenging. Don't guess. Most people, especially children, need a series of lessons to learn the appropriate, courteous way to explore the mountain. This can be a good investment in the future.

Can I observe my child in the lesson?

If you really want to see your child riding, you can ask the instructor where the class will take place. You can spy from behind a sign or a tree but don't let your child see you! Children often listen better, and learn more with less fuss, when parents are not present. Let the instructors do their job. They are good at it and you're on vacation. And, ideally, they are fired up enough to want to take a run with you after the lesson. Be prepared for that.

Younger children often have a tough time separating from their parents but you will be surprised at how often they will quickly adjust and have a great time once their attention is focused on the instructor and the fun activities in the lesson. Make sure your child knows what time you will be back. You could even arrive a bit early for pick up to have your child show you how much she learned.

Lesson Pick-up

When your child's lesson is over be there ready to pick her up **on time**. This means approximately 10-15 minutes before the end of the lesson period. You might even see the tail end of their last run so your child can show you what he learned. This will give you time to hear a review of the lesson and learn about how you can successfully tour the mountain on terrain you will both enjoy. If you were late, think of how sad your child would be if he were the last one to be picked up. Some programs charge extra for a late pick-up.

If you cannot be at the meeting area on time, arrange for one of your designated people listed on the release form to take your place. That person may need to check in at the office to pick up an alternate claim release form for your child if you have the original.

What kinds of questions should I ask the instructor after the lesson?

First, listen to the instructor talking to the children at the end of the lesson. A good teacher will gather the class and check for understanding to see if they remember the high points of the lesson. You will also see how the instructor relates to the children. The

instructor is responsible for all of the children, so be patient if the instructor's attention isn't devoted to just you and your questions.

Once most of the children have been picked up, you can ask specific questions, such as:

- What did your child learn?
- What can you remind her to do when you take her riding?
- What trails would be appropriate?
- What might your child learn in the next class?

Listen to the information the instructor has for you about your child's behavior (good *or* bad), so you can coach for success in the future. If the behavior is not what you expected or would have liked, remember that you weren't there. Children often behave differently when not with their parents. Just listen and coach your child toward better behavior in the future and be sure to commend good achievements.

Do I tip the instructor?

This is a personal choice but as in any service position, tips are always appreciated. Tip your instructor if he/she did a good job. Whether the lesson was good (your child learned a ton and had lots of fun) or bad (your child learned nothing and cried all day long) your child's instructor probably earned his wage and more.

How can I help my child become a better rider?

Practice! Miles, miles, and more miles. Your child needs miles and you both need to go out and have fun. It's hard to teach your own children, but the more mileage they get, the better. Make sure the terrain is appropriate and go for it! Beyond that, continued lessons will contribute to continued progress.

PLANNING YOUR VISIT

Which snowsports area should we visit?

Not surprisingly, time and expense are important considerations in deciding where to go. Whether you live close to a snowsports area or far from anything that remotely resembles winter, you'll need to factor in travel time as well as the time you'll actually spend at the destination. Schedule activities so you won't feel rushed.

To help you get a handle on costs, either call various areas directly or go online to compare prices and services—most have

websites that provide information on rates, lodging, activities, and special deals. Word of mouth is a good source of information, too; so ask your friends where they like to visit and how their family enjoyed the lessons. This is a family vacation, so make sure to pick a location that is family-friendly and offers activities for everyone.

When should we go?

Holidays and weekends tend to be the busiest times, so be sure to plan accordingly. You might even want to consider scheduling your visit during the week or on a non-holiday weekend, if possible. On the other hand, what better way to spend a winter holiday than with your family on the slopes?

Can I purchase lift tickets in advance?

Most areas sell lift tickets in advance and may sell multiple-day tickets. Many areas also sell lift tickets through local retail shops and grocery stores. When purchasing a lesson for a child, be aware that the lift ticket might be included in the price. Verify this so you won't end up buying more tickets than you need. If you aren't certain that your child will like the sport after the first day or will be able to participate multiple days, buy daily tickets!

What are other things we can do?

There are a lot of other activities you can do during your visit. Cross country skiing, ice skating, snowshoeing, building a snowman, and sledding are other fun family activities that are often available at winter sports areas. These activities are great fitness fun and can help you and your family enjoy the great outdoors during the winter. Play games, sit in front of the fire and build a puzzle, drink hot chocolate, and enjoy your family time together. Go sightseeing in town, see a movie, and check out the chamber of commerce and the local library.

How can I prepare my child for the trip?

If you know far enough ahead of time, you can make sure your child has had enough exercise and is physically ready to be out sliding for a whole day. Some children may still be taking naps; you can prepare younger children by making sure they are well rested. Reading a book together about the sport is also a good thing to do to get ready for the trip.

Kids should know their whole name, birth date, parent's full names, phone number, address at home, and whether or not they have any allergies. You can review these questions and answers with your children to help them mentally prepare.

For young children, if you can rent the gear before your day on the hill, try and walk around in the boots and even play in the skis or snowboard on a non-slippery surface to help build confidence and familiarity with their gear.

What kind of clothing is needed for a safe and successful day on the slopes?

A day at the mountains is not quite as easy as a day at the beach. First and foremost is the proper clothing. It is best to layer clothing to help with moisture control and warmth. If it gets hot, a layer can be taken off. The base layer should be a synthetic or wool piece that wicks moisture away from the body to help with temperature control, a turtleneck, and then a fleece or other warm outer layer. It's best to stay away from cotton clothing; it doesn't really keep you warm, especially when it gets wet. Outer layers should be insulated and water resistant. Mittens are usually warmer than gloves but sometimes more cumbersome, but either choice needs to be water-resistant and insulated. Grandma's homemade mittens that she knitted for Christmas are great to wear when walking to the car, but they tend to collect snow and get really cold when used in snowsports lessons! Here's a list of suggested gear:

- Waterproof/windproof jacket and pants
- Goggles
- Neck gaiter for sun and harsh weather protection
- Sunscreen to be applied on the face, whole neck, the backs of the hands and wrists, and any other exposed skin.

Does my child need to wear a helmet?

Helmets have become very popular over the years, not only with children, but with adults as well. Wearing a helmet is a very personal decision. Some areas highly recommend the use of helmets and some even make them mandatory during lessons. One thing to consider is that your child is out on the hill with many people who are not only going faster but are also much bigger than your child. A helmet not only offers protection, when worn during snowsports but can function as an instant storage cubby for goggles, gloves, and neck gaiters when your child is indoors.

Ski and snowboard helmets are specifically designed for protecting the head when participating in snowsports and should not be substituted with a bike helmet. If you do not want to purchase a helmet, renting one is an option. Whether renting or buying a helmet, it should be properly fitted. A helmet that is too big (one your child will grow into) is not safe. Look in the "Helpful Websites" section for more information about helmets.

Should we rent or buy equipment?

If you and your family plan on riding quite often over the winter, purchasing or using a seasonal rental program could be a good option for you. If you plan on only riding for a week or a shorter period of time, renting equipment at the mountain may be a better idea. Some seasonal rental programs will allow you to trade equipment in if your child outgrows the equipment before the season ends.

When getting equipment, whether renting or purchasing, it is best to go to a reputable ski and snowboard shop with knowledgeable staff. Most areas have their own rental shops and some with their own children's ski and snowboard schools have separate rental shops just for the children.

Skis and snowboards should be sized according to abilities. Poles are usually limited to older children (ages 6 or 7 and up) or more experienced skiers, but each ski school may have their own policies.

If you do choose to buy only one piece of equipment, buy boots. Boots are a very personal item and are fitted to the individual. Your child will hate the sport if the boots are uncomfortable. They help determine the amount of progress your child makes. Boots should be comfortably snug and worn with only one pair of socks. Don't be afraid to speak up if your child is in pain and says the boot is not fitting correctly.

How will my child's instructor know whose equipment belongs to whom?

Label all pieces, other than base layers, with your child's clothing/equipment with your child's name. Ski and snowboard equipment often looks alike and your child may mix his up with his friend's gear that is two sizes too small. Mark all your personal gear, including jackets, hats, gloves, goggles, skis, poles, and helmets.

How should I store equipment?

Return your rental equipment if you will not be going out on snow again. If you are riding again, some locations offer an overnight storage. Check with the hotel as they often have a locker room in a communal place or individual places to keep your equipment in your room. Be sure that your child's boots are dry for the next day of riding. Some rental shops or overnight storage businesses offer boot-drying service.

Make a point to dry out your child's clothing after you get back to your room. Hang it up or throw it in a dryer if there is one. (Be careful not to hang it too close to an open flame or wood stove.) You will be glad you did this instead of dealing with damp clothing before the next day or when you get back home.

If you own your equipment, have it checked out by a professional periodically to be sure the bindings are functioning correctly and the bases are well tuned for a nice glide.

What sports can help to prepare my child for skiing and snowboarding?

Skiing and snowboarding can be for *anyone*! It can be a pleasant surprise for your computer game, channel surfing, Disney Channel kids. Daily exercise such as running around outside, bike riding, walking, running, swimming, scootering (on a non-motorized scooter), or any sort of activity that involves *movement*, and especially those that hone balancing skills, help your child be a better snowsports participant. Other great crossover activities are soccer, gymnastics, bicycling, hiking, hockey, the game of tag and other playground play.

Ice-skating and in-line skating are especially good crossover activities for skiing. The movement patterns are very similar and they also help with balance and stance. Skateboarding has an obvious parallel with snowboarding.

How do I deal with my child's medications/allergies?

Be sure to bring your child's medicines with you on your trip. Inform the instructor about any medications, medical conditions, or allergies. Over-educate the people who take care of your children, but realize that you will have to be available to administer any medications. Most sports schools are not licensed to do this and will not take on this responsibility.

Do you have any recommendations for traveling with children?

Here's some travel tips:

- Keep your children well hydrated and well fed—snacks and drinks will be necessary.
- Some children have a favorite blanket, pillow, or animal that help them sleep better in the car, train, or at the hotel. Bring paper, pens, crayons, markers, books, car games, music, and CDs/DVDs.
- Play car/plane games with each other to keep the kids entertained.
- Take a lot of breaks if you can and enjoy the sights and sounds as you go. Stretch, walk around, and let the kids run around to expend some of that pent-up energy.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU ARRIVE

Where do we park?

Most areas have a designated parking lot at the base of the mountain with signs pointing the way. However, because of the way some areas are laid out, you may have to take a shuttle, bus, or tram. Check into this before you drive around for an hour, stressed about being late to your child's lesson. Many places offer special "up close" parking for an additional charge. It may be worth it if you have small children and a load to carry.

How do we learn more about the type of terrain at the mountain?

Each area is unique. What may be a mountain to one person might be another's molehill. Check the trail map out ahead of time on the web or pick one up at the mountain but be sure to look at it together before going out on the hill. Also, ask employees at the area for terrain suggestions.

If you are riding with your children, plan your first couple of runs as "warm up" runs on easier trails. Spend time with them to see that they understand the trail markings and what they mean.

Do you have any advice to prepare for a day on the slopes?

A well-balanced breakfast in the morning is the most important thing you can do for children the day they go on snow. This food will fuel them for the better half of the day. In addition, some small snacks in their jacket pockets can go a long way. Natural foods, such as fruit and nuts, are a better alternative than processed, sugary and salty foods. Encourage drinking water throughout the day. Consider lunch

foods as well, but keep in mind that lunch may be provided in an all-day lesson.

Beauty sleep is a must. Make sure your child has had plenty of rest prior to a day on the mountain. If you travel the day before and your child has not had a full 8-10 hours of rest, he may not have his best day.

Consider resting the first day to acclimate, enjoy the new surroundings, and give your family the best opportunity to succeed and have fun. If you live at a low altitude and travel to a much higher altitude for your vacation, the acclimation time allows a chance to get used to the new environment. Take it easy. Shop and go sightseeing. Watch a movie, read books together, play board games, or visit the hotel pool. Do the things together that you never have the time or energy to do at home.

If you have time, the following can make your day of riding more enjoyable:

- Stop at the coffee shop for a drink; get your child one, too.
- Don't make your child walk around in her ski boots. Carry the boots with you and put them on at the meeting place (this saves your child energy and you a lot of stress).
- Give yourself plenty of extra time so you don't feel rushed.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Watch others riding down the mountain.
- Look at a trail map together.

Did you and your child enjoy the trip? Does your child want to go back for more?

If so, tell your friends and family and come back again! Coach them for success. If the experience was not quite what you expected, please let the management know so they might be able to improve their services to improve your next trip. If your children are happy, you will be happy. The best thing for parents is when their children have a good time and learn something new. Winter sports are some of the best family activities you will ever find. Enjoy them often!

HELPFUL WEBSITES

Here's where to turn for more information:

www.aasi.org for the American Association of Snowboard Instructors

www.lidsonkids.org for more information on helmets

www.nsp.org for the National Ski Patrol. Look for the sections about safety/dressing properly

www.nsaa.org for Your Responsibility Code

www.snowlink.com This guide is designed to give you some basic information that will help get you started right

www.snowmonsters.com for information, games, and activities about children's skiing and snowboarding

www.gosunsmart.com ideas and tips for protecting your skin

www.onthesnow.com posts area opening and closing dates and the latest in snowsports news

www.familytravelguides.com The who, what, where, why, and how of traveling with your family

**Parents' Guide to Snowsports
Quick Questions for the Trip**

Resort
Name_____ **Date**_____

Contact Phone/e-mail_____

Are your instructors trained and/or certified? What is their experience with children?

What types of children's snowsports programs do you offer?

Do you have day care for little children and infants?

Do you offer a daycare/sports school combo?

Do you offer both group and private lessons for children?

How many kids are in a lesson together?

When are the lesson times?

How much do the different options cost?

Are there any package deals:

- **for more than one day in the school?**
- **that include lift tickets?**
- **that include rentals?**
- **that include lunch?**

If applicable: Do you have a program for children with special needs?

Can I pre-register my child for ski/snowboard school?

Can I purchase lift tickets in advance?

Where is the rental shop?

Where do we park?

What other activities are offered at your area?