



PARENTING FOR SUCCESS

Winter Sport Parent Information



Selecting the right equipment makes a big difference in skiers and rider's ability to improve and enjoy their season. (USSA photo)

Getting the proper fit for alpine boots:

Boots will pack out after they are worn for several days. Children often feel that boots are too tight when they first try them on after a summer of wearing sandals and tennis shoes. When trying on boots, kids whose feet are growing should wear medium thick ski socks to try on boots. Older children and adults whose feet are no longer growing should wear thin ski socks. A good fitting rule of thumb is to take out the boot insole and stand on it with the back of the heel even with the back of the insole. The front of the insole should stick out in front of the toes about ¼ inch. Remember that bootfitters can make a boot a little bigger through grinding and stretching, but are less able to make a boot smaller while maintaining the performance of the boot.

This information should help you make good choices, but ultimately your child's coaches are the best resources for advice and suggestions specific to your child's programs.

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GETTING THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT

Getting the right equipment for your child is essential for their development and it makes a big difference in their enjoyment of the season as well. It also can be the most daunting decision parents have to make, and unfortunately the price tag can get pretty large. The SSWSC sets up buy nights for athletes to purchase their equipment at special competitor discounts and ensure proper sizing and fit, and works with local shops to provide high-quality, affordable seasonal rentals for young athletes. Here are tips to help you make the most of these opportunities without overspending.

Focus on getting the right boots. Boots are the critical link for performance and comfort. The most common mistake is buying a boot for the child to grow into. A child's ability to flex the boot directly impacts how they can control their ski or snowboard. When the boot is too big, your child's movements don't transfer to the ski or board, so they compensate by using inefficient techniques. When repeated though the season it creates poor habits that are difficult to break.

Another important factor in selecting a boot is its flex. In snowboarding, the stock children's boot has velcro closures and is very soft. SSWSC riders should look for lace boots, not velcro, ideally with a boa strap to keep the boot tight and stiffer for performance. For alpine and freestyle skiers, the tendency is to choose a boot that's too stiff. The athlete should be able to jump and land naturally wearing their boots on a flat surface. If they continually fall backward, the boot may be too stiff. Remember that in a warm ski shop the boot will flex much more than it will outside in January. Flexing should not be too difficult in the shop.

Considerations for skis and boards. As with boots, avoid the temptation to purchase a length that your child will grow into. The outcome is the same – your child uses inefficient movements to compensate for the poor fit and these can become ingrained. For snowboarders, intro riders will have success on reverse camber or rockered boards, but as they improve SSWSC recommends that children purchase cambered boards. The cambered boards help riders learn proper edging skills that will help them in the long run. Many children's binding setups have only one strap, but look for bindings with two straps unless the feet are very small.

Young alpine skiers face a dilemma of how many skis to buy. For U10 and younger, only one pair of carving skis is needed. Separate skis for different disciplines are not necessary. Discipline-specific skis may give the skier a small advantage in competition, but skiers on a single pair for all disciplines develop better ski control skills that benefit them later on. Young alpine and freestyle skiers should stay away from big rocker skis and wide skis underfoot.

Protect your child's head. A quality, well-fitted helmet is the most important investment into your child's safety. Here again, don't size for growing into – a hat or headband underneath to fill the space does not support the function of the helmet. We don't recommend buying used, as damage from a crash or having been dropped is not always visible.