



## Start The Season Out Right – Five First Day Tips for Parents

By Jon Nolting, USSA Sport Education Director

The first day of the new season is fast approaching. It should be a day of excitement and fun for your skier or snowboarder, something they've been looking forward to ever since the leaves started changing. The first days of the season are very important in many aspects for your child. Whether you are new to a ski or snowboard program or have been at it many years, these tips will help you prepare your child to have a successful start to a great season.

- 1. Be ready with the right gear.** If your club has not provided any guidance, ask them for it. We offer these tips that will generally always apply:
  - The boots are a very important piece of equipment. [Proper fit and flex](#) are essential. Don't fall into the trap of buying boots that are a size larger than your child's feet for them to grow into. A serious loss in performance, and often in comfort, is the result. Boots will pack out some with wear, so they should be tight to begin with. Let your child walk around the house before their first training day to get their feet used to the boots. Also be sure to have the bindings of their skis or board adjusted to the new boots before they show up for training.
  - Make sure your child dresses warmly and in layers. Not only will your child have an unpleasant day if they are underdressed, but the whole group will be impacted as the coach ends up spending more time in the lodge with the group than in teaching and skiing/riding the trails. Avoid these common mistakes: cotton socks, gloves with little insulation or waterproofing, and goggles that fit poorly in the helmet leaving a gap of exposed forehead. Don't forget to put your child's name and phone number on everything. It will get left somewhere over the course of the season and you'll want to have a chance to get it back!
  - Have a [quality helmet](#). You want your child to train hard, so they need to wear a quality helmet at all times that meets [competition regulations](#). As with boots, a snug fit is important for proper function and comfort. Take care of those helmets. Don't let your child carry it outside their bag, pack it inside to decrease the chance it will hit hard on the floor to keep it from losing its ability to protect your child in a crash.
  - Get your lift or trail passes before the first day of training if possible. Otherwise expect long lines and arrive early.
- 2. Boost your child's energy.** The first day for your child usually involves an early wake up call, and a long day outside. Ensure your child gets enough sleep by having things ready a day ahead of time, so they can go to bed early. Encourage hydration by having your child drink plenty of fluids the day before, and before 6:00pm. Prepare a healthy dinner with plenty of carbohydrates. In the morning, allow time for a healthy breakfast. Have your child pack some easy to eat snacks in their pocket that won't freeze or get hard in the cold weather. Even though your child may not sweat in the cold, winter weather, they will become dehydrated. An insulated water bottle or Camelbak is good to keep with them.

3. **Set expectations and ground rules for your child's participation.** Identify what things are your child's responsibility when it comes to getting ready for ski or snowboard practice. They should take on more and more responsibility as the season goes along. Help by making a list of what your child needs to have packed for the day and have them post it somewhere they can check each day. Discuss the other expectations you have of your child to participate in their sport – keeping grades up, working on their fitness, eating right and staying hydrated, and helping out around the house all may be part. Come to an agreement before the first day of training. It is also important to understand what your child's goals and motivations are for their skiing and snowboarding so you can support these over the course of the season.
4. **Get involved.** The first step is to genuinely show interest in your child's involvement in skiing or snowboarding. Talk to them about it, watch them at events (and at practice too), and get to know their coach. A great way to learn more about the sport is to volunteer to help at competitions. Start on day one finding out from your club how you can help out, stay informed, and connect with other families.
5. **Ask the right questions.** There are two parts to this. First is asking the right questions of your child's coach or club. Get your child's competition schedule and find out how to register for events. Ask about your child's attitude and progress. Ask about things you can help reinforce at home. Learn when your coach is accessible. Before practice is usually too hectic. First thing in the morning is also the most hectic time for the club office. You are more likely to get good answers to your questions later in the morning from the club office, or after practice from your coach. The second part is asking the right questions of your child about their skiing and snowboarding. Ask them about practice. Find out what they are learning. Ask them what they think is fun, what is challenging, what they don't like. Many times as parents we get caught up asking them how they did, what place they got, or whether they beat so-and-so. Instead, from the first day of training, show more interest in what they are doing to get better than in what their [outcomes](#) are. This way you won't be inadvertently adding pressure to them in competitions, and you can help them keep competition in perspective. Praise them for their effort, not their abilities, and they will have the best chance for success and enjoyment.

**Getting involved in your child's skiing or snowboarding is important, but don't let your involvement conflict with your child's coach's role. If you believe that your child is not getting all they need from their coach, discuss your concerns privately with the coach. You want your child to get their coaching from the coach, so they can rely on you for loving support whether they are struggling or experiencing great success.**

