

Ski or Snowboard for kids

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Snowboarding takes more strength and coordination than skiing, so children tend to start boarding at an older age. Irish National Snowboard Team member Jen Grace says her nephew started boarding at 4. "There's a skier's bias that kids have to start on skis," she laughs. "I would have said 6 is a good age to start snowboarding, but my nephew proves that wrong."

To start a little one on a snowboard, plan to use ski boots and bindings until they're about 7 and their lower leg muscles develop. By 8 years old, your child will likely be ready for soft boots and regular strap bindings. Wrist guards and a helmet are essential. Snowboard equipment can often be rented for the season.

Find your child's stance by having her put her feet together and lean forward as far as possible. Whichever foot she puts forward to catch herself should be at the front of the board.

Tow your child around the yard or somewhere snowy to get the feel of sliding.

Use the parent lift and cart the new snowboarder up a small hill. Run down a few feet and catch her. Extend the distance until comfortable enough to head to a ski resort.

As with skiing, ask the liftie to slow the chairlift while you carry your child on and off. Only the front foot should be strapped in while riding the lift.

Once on the hill, after strapping in her other foot, have your child start with her snowboard perpendicular to a small slope. Help her stand up so she's looking down the slope. If you're fairly proficient on skis or a snowboard yourself, hold your child's hand and instruct her to put weight on her heels and point her toes just a little bit to start sliding down the hill. (You may need to do this in your boots!) She can pull back up on her toes to stop. Repeat this until she gets the hang of coming to a stop.

Next try a "falling leaf" pattern, again holding her hand. To begin sliding, tell your child to press down with the toes of the front foot. To stop sliding, pull back up with the same foot. After reaching the edge of the run, stop and press down with the toes of the other foot to start sliding in the other direction. Again, pull up to stop. Repeat this back-and-forth "falling leaf" pattern all the way to the bottom of the run.