

## SNOWTACULAR ADVENTURES IN THE HIGH COUNTRY

### SKIING AND SNOWBOARDING 101

For many parents in Colorado, teaching their children how to ski is one of the highlights of the parental role. They picture beautiful blue-sky days, children who quickly start eating their pizza and french fries, cheerfully riding the lifts over snowcapped trees and concluding the day with a lingering hot chocolate. The reality, like many things, can be much less romantic after hours of ski traffic, snot, temper tantrums and the desperate ache in one's knees and back that comes from hunching over a young skier. Suddenly, parents might find themselves begging, cajoling or downright screaming at kids to do another run and enjoy it!

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While skiing or snowboarding with a child can be wonderful and rewarding, it is nice to know that there are other options than teaching them by oneself. The adventure can be much more enjoyable if children have already mastered the basics, taught to them by trained professionals, so that the parent can swoop in and reap the real enjoyable moments of skiing with a kid who is having fun because they already know what they are doing. The Front Range ski resorts offer a plethora of fine options for children of all ages to learn how to ski and ride. The bonus is that while the children are learning, it frees the parent for some adult ski time, which tends to make one more patient when they rendezvous with their child.

With younger children, resorts have surprisingly few options for half-day group ski lessons, and full day lessons can be a bit much for new skiers or children under the age of 7. In fact, on a casual survey, A-Basin is one of the few resorts that regularly offers half-day lessons for young children. Full-day group lessons can make for a grouchy little one at the end of the day, but Elizabeth Schweimlein, an Evergreen mother of 6-year old and 4-year-old skiers notes, “Breckenridge’s staff is great. They are informative, personable and really make little ones feel comfortable being away from their parents all day. The learning area is only for the ski school, making it manageable for little learners. Nolan learned a ton there and also enjoyed the games and food in the ski school lodge. I would definitely do a

full-day lesson again.” If group lessons aren’t right for your child, private lessons can also be a smart choice.

Two-hour private lessons often end up being a bit less than a full-day group lesson and allow the instructor to really focus on the level of the child. A Conifer mother of a 7-year old, Heather Wolfers, comments that “the 1-2 hour privates seem to work better for a boy of little attention span than the all-day options.” Everyone on the panel of moms I consulted mentioned Jungle Jim at Loveland as their instructor of choice. He’s the one who rides around Loveland basin with a stuffed snake on his hat, and he is just goofy enough to keep children’s attention, while being an excellent instructor under the goofiness. If you are the parent of a young snowboarder, particularly anything other than a beginner, private lessons may be your only option. While many resorts advertise group snowboarding lessons for children as young as 6, in reality, these often do not fill with children of the same age. Sometimes the resort will eat the cost, allowing your child to have a private lesson at the cost of a group lesson, but more often they will put your child with a group of similarly-aged but differently skilled children, which can lead to a frustrating experience for kids on both sides of the spectrum.

There are also several options designed just for local kids where students are grouped by levels and then meet regularly with the same group and same instructor, allowing kids to become more comfortable in the class and also inspired by the speed at which Colorado children seem to take to winter sports. Winter Wigglers at Loveland is new this year and is a three-hour program intended for preschool skiers to come up mid-week to escape the weekend crowds. Each day runs from 10:30 am till 2 pm and includes a two-hour ski lesson, lunch and one hour of educational indoor activities, which allows kiddos to get some practice on the snow and understanding of the mountains inside, all while parents get a few hours to themselves. A-Basin has a similar program, the Lil Kids’ Club, which meets for four weeks on Saturday mornings. Another option at Loveland for older kids is Loveland Explorers, a six-week program. Coaches from both the Ski and Ride School and the Loveland Racing Team work together to develop skills of intermediate and advanced skiers and snowboarders ages 7-14. Children stay with the same coach and group of kids all six weeks, so they really have opportunities to grow and develop within a community.

Most of the Front Range resorts have some kind of comparable program, each with its own advantages. For teenagers, A-Basin applies the concept to its Xtreme Teen Camp on Saturdays from 9-3, which is intended for

skiers only. Copper Mountain has some of the best options for locals’ teaching programs, including their Trail Blazer program for 3-5 year olds with an option for kids to snowboard on Fridays, as well as their Scooters, Choppers and Big Mountain programs. Copper offers some nice extras, such as an optional charter bus with adult supervision to and from the mountain, GPS real-time tracking on all students and a variety of levels, all the way up to truly expert levels for teenagers, along with their Woodward Camp, which offers free-style oriented sessions like their Park Rats Seasonal Program every Saturday over four, eight or twelve weeks. Breckenridge, Keystone and other I-70 resorts all offer these types of ski club options that are really geared toward helping young, local skiers and riders advance to their full potential while connecting with other local children and keeping the cost more affordable than private or standard group lessons.

One friend claims that you should never take a child skiing until they literally beg you to go. This seems like a good way to look at it: it’s not the begging that matters, but that it provides evidence that a child is excited about skiing. If you want to establish a life-long love of a sport in your child, it might be worth spending the money to invest in professional instructors at one of the many fine options available on the Front Range. The day will come soon enough when you struggle to catch up as your child races down the mountain in front of you or does aerobatics in the halfpipe that make your hands sweat inside your gloves, and you both sit down afterward to share that lingering hot chocolate.