

A Parents' Guide to Ice Skating



Essential reading for all parents



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As a parent or carer of a skater you naturally want the best for your child.

The Aussie Aussie Skate™ Parents' Guide will help you to assist your child's skating experience and make skating a fun and valuable time for your family.

Understanding your responsibilities as a skating parent

- Encourage your child to skate but don't pressure. Let your child choose to skate if he or she wants to.
- Understand what your child wants from skating and provide a supportive environment to achieve their goals.
- Skating is a part of your child's life, not their entire life.
- Ensure the coach and/or coaches are qualified to guide your child through their skating experience.
- Keep winning/losing in perspective and help your child do the same.
- Help your child set challenging but realistic performance goals rather than focusing only on winning.
- Help your child to understand the valuable lessons skating can teach in life skills.
- Help your child meet responsibilities to the coach.
- Discipline your child when necessary.
- Remember you are the parent and the coach is the teacher. Trust your coach. Don't meddle or coach from the sidelines in practices or at competitions.

Welcome to the world of Ice Skating

All ice sports are conducted in Australia from a recreational level to elite athlete representation at the Olympic Winter Games.

Figure Skating: Artistry on Ice. Includes Singles Skating (Men and Ladies), Ice Dancing, Pairs Skating and Synchronized Skating from Aussie Skate™ to club, state, national and international level.

Ice Hockey: The fastest game on Earth. For boys, girls, men and women of all ages. Competition starts in age groups and progresses through to divisions at club, state, national and international level.

Short Track Speed Skating: "Do a Bradbury" like Steven Bradbury, Australia's first Olympic Winter Gold Medallist in 2002 at Salt Lake City in the 1000m. First over the line wins in short track. Fast and exciting.

Long Track Speed Skating: Recreational and competitive racing on a 400 metre track. Held mostly outdoors and in the northern hemisphere. Skaters race against the clock.

Curling: Curling doesn't require ice skates but it still needs accuracy and skill. With similarities to bowling, curling involves the use of polished granite stones (rocks). Two sweepers armed with brooms try to get the rock as close as possible to the target (house).

Did you know?

World-wide, millions of children aged between 6 and 16 years of age participate in organised sports. They enjoy their sport because they want to:

- have fun
- improve their skills and learn new skills
- be with friends and make new friends
- feel the excitement of competition
- succeed or win
- exercise and become fit

If the reason your child chooses to participate is not fulfilled, he or she may drop out of the sport.

Help your child enjoy skating

You can help your child enjoy skating by being aware of the following:

- Develop a winning perspective by building your child's self esteem
- Emphasise fun, skill development and striving to do his or her best
- Help your child set challenging performance goals

Making your skater a champion for life

What is success? Success is the easily measured distance between your origin and your final achievement. Athletic participation and competition in ice skating allows your child the opportunity to develop and excel. While pursuing self-improvement and achievement, athletes transcend themselves and become better people or champions for life.

Here are some valuable characteristics that are developed and enhanced in successful athletes:

- Persistence
- Courage
- Perspective
- Concentration
- Self confidence
- Self worth
- Desire

Life values learned through participation

Your child can benefit by participating in ice skating but it's important to note that there are no guarantees.

The best results are born from a co-operative effort within local skating clubs, which include the skaters, coaches, officials, volunteers and parents.

Benefits come more readily when adults put the interests of children first and leave their own egos and desires at home.

Developing self-esteem

Through ice skating your child can develop an appreciation for an active lifestyle, increase their self-esteem, confidence and discipline. By being more self-reliant in mastering and performing skating skills, your child can learn how to manage stress, perform under pressure and test their emotional and physical balance.

Developing social skills with other children of varying ages, adults and peer groups equips a child with a growing list of life skills and helps them to learn about managing success and disappointment.

Fair play

Learning about fair play, being a good sport and respect for others helps keep a balanced outlook during a child's skating years.

Ice Skating in all its disciplines, be it figure skating, synchronized skating, ice hockey or speed skating requires dedication.

As your child becomes more involved in his or her sport, you will find that they want to do nothing but skate. However, it's important that our children continue to develop all round athletic skills, have other interests and remain committed to their education.

Juggling sport, education and other interests or activities can make it seem difficult to keep balance in your child's life as the practice hours increase. Some schools will adapt your child's schedule but that is not always necessary.

Appreciate other sports and the arts

Take your child to other sports events and consider the similarities and differences. For Ice Hockey players, seeing how other team sports prepare and compete can help improve their game on the ice.

For figure skaters see the ballet, concerts, musicals, theatre and visit museums and galleries.

Choosing a Coach

Finding a coach can be stressful and bewildering. How do you know who is the right coach for your child? How much experience does the coach have?

For parents new to ice skating, there are far more questions than answers. The coach you choose is a person who will spend hours training and interacting with your child and who will have input into shaping their attitude regarding skating, their peer group, competition and in general.

Research is the answer.

What to look for in your new coach

There are several considerations when looking for a coach which include personality, learning and teaching styles, experience and technical knowledge. You best know your child's personality and temperament and how they get on with others.

Other qualities to consider when finding a coach include:

- good role model
- respect and enthusiasm
- standard of ethics
- adheres to safety guidelines
- member of the Australian Professional Skater's Association (APSA). All APSA members are accredited with the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) and fully insured.

Determine your requirements

Before you can find a great coach for your child, determine what makes your child tick. While a coach might have performed miracles with other skaters, your child might not respond to his or her coaching style. Think about the types of people who work well with your child and the ways in which he or she is best motivated. Does the child have any favourite teachers? And if so, why is that teacher a favourite? Are there certain adult family members with whom the child interacts particularly well? Does he or she feel more comfortable with older or younger adults, males or females?

Not all athletes respond the same to all types of coaches. Some need disciplinarians, others may respond better to coaches who are reserved. Once you have identified what type of coach would work best with your child, spend time watching a variety of coaches' work with other students. Are the coaches positive and encouraging? Are they professional? Are they punctual and do they come to the lesson prepared?

Compare options

Before long you will have developed a list of coaches who you feel are worth closer inspection. Begin by setting a meeting, which provides an opportunity for you to ask questions and to discover how you, and your child, interact on a personal level with the prospective coach.

A few questions we recommend asking include:

- What is your coaching philosophy?
- How long have you been coaching? Keep in mind, however, that because a coach is new doesn't mean you shouldn't go to them.
- What are your greatest coaching accomplishments?
- Did you skate competitively?
- What is your skating background?

- Do you specialise in coaching certain disciplines? (Singles, Ice Dance, Pairs, Synchronized Skating)
- What is your current coaching accreditation level?
- How do you stay current with the sport and the profession of coaching?
- What are your rates for lessons, competitions, providing competitive program music, etc.?
- How often do you bill for charges? Do you charge GST?
- When do you expect to be paid?
- What is your policy if we have to cancel a planned lesson or session?
- Are there any other policies that we should be aware of in advance?

Review and Research

Even if your child only skates a few days a week, the coach will have a significant influence. Take the time to talk to as many people as necessary until you are satisfied that you are making a good choice.

The intricacies of the sport can be overwhelming. It takes time to develop a complete grasp of every type of rating, competition, level, etc. If, during your meeting, unfamiliar subjects are raised, do some research and don't be afraid to ask questions. Your coach will be only too happy to discuss and answer any question you may have.

Follow up

Having selected a coach, then observe the lessons. Be comfortable that the coach/skater relationship you have invested in is what you want it to be.

If, after observing a few sessions, you have questions or concerns ask for a meeting. A respectful and open dialogue can prevent problems down the road. If you have a situation that you feel warrants attention, take it privately to the board of directors of the club or management of the rink and allow them to handle it appropriately.

The Australian Professional Skaters Association overseas all matters relating to coaches in figure skating.

Let the coach do their job

It is the role of the coach to teach, guide and provide constructive criticism. The parent's role is to support, encourage and recognise their child's efforts.

If a parent attempts to coach their child, the child may get confused with conflicting information. It is important to not to undermine the coach in front of the skater, as this can be extremely harmful to the coach/skater relationship, which is necessary for success.

Respect all coaches

A coach should be respected for the experience and expertise they bring to teaching your child. This includes teaching "ice manners" regarding all users in the ice rink.

Etiquette and Behaviour

Training session etiquette

Unlike Ice Hockey, which is a team sport and more structured for drills and practice, or Short Track, which is similar for group activity, figure skating training sessions can be crowded. As your child advances in figure skating, he or she must learn to be aware of other skaters, either in lessons or performing their program to music.

During training if the skater needs to stop, they should move to the barrier.

Appropriate Behaviour

As your child's skating improves, younger skaters will view him or her as a role model.

Be on time and don't waste ice time. Ice time is expensive. Explain to your child that it is important to be on time for practice and lessons.

Competition can be stressful. Learning how to lose with grace will make any wins more valuable. Making friends and having fun needs to be encouraged by parents at every opportunity.

What do I say after a fall?

Falling is a part of ice skating and is often the best teacher. Never falling means never improving. Don't allow your child to cry after every fall.

Frustration and resulting tantrums do occur. Kicking the ice, barriers or anything else is unacceptable as is bad language.

Keep your comments to your child and others positive.

Competitions

As part of the Aussie Skate™ Program, competitions are conducted regularly within your own rink and at other rinks. Aussie Skate™ competitions cater for all levels prior to entering higher club and state competitions and are aimed at building confidence and having fun. Participation in events is not mandatory.

Types of Competitions

Aussie Skate™ competitions can be your first introduction to skating events. They have a number of divisions depending on skaters' test level. There may also be other types of events such as Artistic which allow skaters to be creative and have fun. Skaters from other rinks may also participate.

After Aussie Skate™, the skater can progress into mainstream testing and competition, which is organised by your local skating club under the rules of the State and National Association. To compete in these events, skaters will need to join a local skating club and state association.

Understanding and preparing for competitions

You may be introduced to competitions through an Aussie Skate™ competition at your local rink. Your child may need private lessons to help prepare them for a figure skating event. Ice Hockey and Short Track Speed Skating coaching is usually conducted in a squad setting.

In Figure Skating the coach will provide guidance for music choices, level of competition to enter, choreography and costume advice.

How often should your child compete?

As your child works toward preparing for competitions or tournaments expect his or her training to focus on the competition season as a whole. Seek the coach's advice for the best preparation.

Competition Tips and Information

To find competitions, the local figure skating Club or State Association will have a calendar of events on their website. The organisation running the competition will post a competition announcement which includes details about the schedule, rules for the divisions, how to enter, entry fees and contact details.

Being prepared for competition is easy. Here are a few tips;

- Repair kit-screw driver, band-aids, needle and thread, safety pins
- Bring your camera/video camera
- A positive attitude
- A cheery smile

Ask your coach what you need to take with you. All disciplines in ice sports require various equipment and accessories. Be prepared and always have extra equipment in case things go wrong. Additional expenses for coach travel and time may be applicable.

Be on time. It's not unusual for events to run early. Registration for every event will be required and an area in each rink will be set aside for this purpose.

And don't forget your skates!

Winning isn't everything

How your child views their performance and result will be a reflection of how the parent and coach think. Approach each competition with the thought that "The experience of being here means success." Their best effort makes your child a winner.

Developing and improving skills as a child trains for an event makes a successful skater. Actively encourage your child to respect their competitors. An obsession with winning can create a fear of failure, which may result in a less than average performance and an upset child.

Praise your child after he or she skates. Also praise other skaters and have your child congratulate skaters who performed well. Once results are posted, continue to praise your child for a job well done.

Respect the officials. Judge and Technical Officials are volunteers who have extensive training. Respect their opinion and uphold their decisions. They are open to questions and constructive feedback. Don't be afraid to ask.

Building your child's confidence and self esteem

A child with well developed self-esteem is more likely to be proud of their personal accomplishments, accept new tasks and challenges and help others. Children whose confidence depends upon winning will be more likely to experience a loss of self-esteem.

If your child is aiming for their Personal Best (PB) or a set private goal and they accomplish their task, they are successful regardless of the final place.

We all have "off" days and young skaters need to recognise that every training or competitive day cannot go perfectly.

Encourage your child to set realistic goals

Competing is integral to skill development. Setting realistic and attainable goals for participation, effort and continuing skill development is essential to achieve PB's, regardless of whether the skater will compete for Australia or are happy at a recreational level.

PB recording ensures that the focus is on individual improvement rather than on winning or losing. Record your child's PB or attained goal at each event, which acts as a marker for their progress that they can see.

Communication

Talk about training, competition results and their relationships with their coach, team mates and others in their environment. Positive debriefing leads to a happier outcome.

Questions to ask could include:

- What new skill did you learn today?
- What was the best thing that happened today?
- What does your coach think you need to work on?

Don't compare your child to others

It can be difficult not to compare your child to others. It will seem at times that a child who was once doing the same things as your child is progressing at a quicker pace or mastering more skills. Children develop and progress at different rates. You may find your child not being able understand why they are not progressing at the same pace as other skaters.

A guide to buying skates

Which ice sport does your child prefer? Is it figure skating, ice hockey or short track speed skating? As your child moves from the Aussie Skate™ Program you will find that each ice sport requires different boots and blades.

Your child may have progressed through Aussie Skate™ using rental skates and if they want to continue, it is time to find the correct skates for their chosen sport.

There are a variety of skates on offer at your local skate shop or on line. Most ice rinks have experienced personnel in their skate shops, who provide sound advice, and carry a comprehensive range of figure and ice hockey skates. Short track boots and blades are more individual. The skate shop operator and local club can provide further information.

Be prepared to spend a minimum of \$150 - \$250 for new entry level skates. Rinks and Clubs usually have a range of second-hand skates and other skating equipment. For beginners, a good all-purpose pair of skates will be sufficient.

Are second-hand boots and blades OK?

Good quality used skates are a good alternative, especially for beginners. Ask your coach for advice on what to look for. Sometimes a higher quality used boot and blade is better than an inexpensive, lower-quality new boot and blade. Make sure the boot has support and the blade still has "sharpening life".

Correct fit

What you need to look for is a boot with good, firm support around the ankle. The foot has to fit in the boot so that there is no extra room in the boot, especially in the heel. Some boots have a higher arch built in than others. The skater should try on several pairs of boots if possible for a correct fit.

Most boots and blades are bought separately, but in the beginning stages boot and blade combinations are available and acceptable. Just like any pair of leather shoes, boots can be colour changed as required if availability is limited.

Appropriate quality of the boot/blade to the level of skating and the amount of time on the ice

A boot that is too stiff for the beginner skater will be difficult to "break• in" and your child will not want to skate for long if the boots hurt. Explain to your child that a good boot can hurt at first and to expect a "break-in" period.

Many skate companies have a web site that describes an appropriate boot/blade combination for your level.

Be careful if buying second hand boots online that they do have enough support. Boots that are too soft/floppy around the ankle will not only cause the skaters ankles to ache, they will not provide the required support for even the most basic of moves.

Appropriate quality of the boot/blade combination to the size of the individual

A small stature skater who is on the ice for many hours each week and progressing fast may require a higher quality boot and blade than the same size skater who puts in less ice time and practice.

A figure blade is different to other types of blades in its size and shape and has a toe pick at the front. The figure skating blade is designed for a moderate level of speed, manoeuvrability for various elements and the toe pick is for jumping, not for stopping.

Sharpening

Blades need to be sharpened regularly. Most rinks will have a skate sharpening shop.

How to maintain your skates

Always have a cloth to wipe down blades after each use to prevent rust and encourage your child to perform these themselves. Place 'soakers' on the blades once they have been dried to ensure moisture is soaked up and to protect the blades when not in use.

Skate guards protect the edge on the blade and prolong their life. Remember to remove the guards before stepping onto the ice. Always wear guards when walking in your skates, however do not leave the guards on once you have taken the skates off. The blades should not be stored with the guards on as this could cause the blades to rust. Use 'soakers' instead.

Depending upon how often your child skates, it is recommended that blades be sharpened every six weeks. Refer to the manufacturer's recommendations and ask your coach for advice. Ask your local rink about their blade sharpening service.

Keep the laces in good order. Always have a spare pair in the skate bag.

What to wear in your Aussie Skate™ class?

Flexible form-fitting warm clothing will be all you will need plus a pair of gloves. It is recommended to wear a few layers of clothing so you can remove layers when skaters warm up. It is recommended very young skaters wear a bike helmet and some rinks will provide these. Safety is the most important factor. Loose, long and ill-fitting clothing is not advisable. Being overly rugged up is usually not necessary as skating is hot work once the skater gets going.

Resist the temptation to wear thick socks - you won't need them. Some parents advocate the use of protective knee and elbow wear.

Competition, tournament and race wear

Figure skaters require competition outfits, which should be appropriate for the event. Competition outfits don't need to be overly fussy or expensive. Often costumes that have only been worn a few times are available for purchase or hire. Commercially, some dance wear shops can be quite helpful. Skates should be cleaned (if not using boot covers). Warm up or club jackets are useful prior to the event.

Speed skaters wear skins. Racing helmets, ice racing gloves and protective knee and elbow wear is mandatory.

Ice hockey players have a full uniform with protective clothing including full helmets, mouth guards and accessories.

Ask your club representative and coach for more information.

How Mum, Dad and the family can be involved

Parents are the main secret to success in any sport. They are the people who offer access to the sport, provide moral support, and ensure that competitions can be run.

Volunteering means that you have another avenue to impact your child's skating environment and life skills plus providing you with a fun setting in which to meet other adults and make new friends.

Here a few simple ways to be involved:

- Be a gate marshall at competitions
- Become an announcer or music steward
- Be a convener for the Club's second-hand shop
- Fund-raising
- Cook the sausage sizzle
- Be involved in the club newsletter
- Make your skills known
- Be a car pool driver
- Join a club committee

As a volunteer, you can be instrumental in strengthening ice skating in Australia.

Skating Lingo

Aussie Skate™	The national Learn to Skate program and an initiative of Ice Skating Australia
Axel	A Jump of 1 1/2 revolutions named after its creator Axel Paulsen
Barrier/Boards	The surrounding wall around the sides of the rink
Edges	Inside and outside edges are found on the skate blade and correspond to the inside and outside of the foot
Free Skating	A program set to music featuring jumps, spins, steps and linking movements
Ice Dancing	Can be likened to ballroom dancing on ice.
Pair Skating	The performance of various manoeuvres (jumps, spins, steps) in unison together with lifts, throws and death spirals.
Synchronized Skating	A team of up to 16 skaters performing routines together
Theatre on Ice	A relatively new discipline where a group of skaters present a theatrical performance.

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