

We would like to welcome all the newly registered players to the association this year. We have put together some information that we think will be useful as the parents and players get ready for the season. The information below is - for some - just a refresher and for others, new information. This information is mostly for the "learn to" skaters.

You do not need to know everything. We all learn as we go and acquire more and more information each year. This should be a big help to get you prepared for your first practice.

"Learn to" skaters;

I think it is important to have the gear early and have your child wear it. Being comfortable in the equipment before introducing a new environment is very important. It is common to have children cry the first day, and it creates a chain effect (it's a big stressful day!!). By doing these few things I think we can greatly reduce the stress on the children and ourselves. The more comfortable we are, the more comfortable they are. Have them wear their gear at home often. Practice putting it on at home a few times. Put their skates on them and have them walk around. At home I used skate guards and had my kids walk on the cement outside or even an old rug. Teaching them how to stand up from sitting is something you can do with them on dry land too. Have them lay on their back, roll to their stomach, push up to kneel, one foot up, put both hands on the knee, push down with your hands and extend your leg. If your child cannot stand/walk in skates on dry land they will not be able to stand on ice (its slippery). So take time with them before hitting the ice, this will help them enjoy their time on the ice all the more. The first thing we learn to do in practice is fall, stand up, fall, get back up and fall again. If you haven't gotten to walking in skates before the first practice yet, bring them anyway we will work with them. That's what we are here for. But to refresh lots and lots and lots of time at home walking in skates and gear makes for an easier first day on the ice.

Before I get into equipment it is important to remember that even though all equipment is not required, it is good to have it. Learning to skate with it on will build for later. Its hard to skate with all that new stuff in the way. Getting equipment that fits properly also helps. Bulky items can get in the way and items that are too small may not protect properly. A problem that you will become familiar with is, equipment that is not fitted properly will slide out of place and not protect your child as intended. For that problem there is tape. The tape can assist in keeping equipment in place (and nearly every player uses it) but properly fitting equipment is the best defense in regards to injuries. The association has a lot of equipment available for starters. Jason Attenberger is the equipment manager, get in touch with him to set up a time to check out equipment. Jason's contact info can be found under the Board tab on the

Association website, which is [www.wasecahockey.org](http://www.wasecahockey.org). Pay attention for further emails and the association page for more details on how to acquire equipment.

Helmet full faced guard: (required at all levels) I have found that the adjustable helmets have been best. They usually fit best and can grow with your child for a number of years. It is important to have a snug fit. Older kids will know right away if there helmet is a good fit. For smaller children it is a good idea to have them wear it for a while before the season starts. Remember they will have it on for an hour+ on the ice. Wearing the helmet before the seasons starts will build the neck muscles and make it more comfortable.

Mouth guard: (required at all levels) I prefer the ones on the string for young children this way they can reach through the helmet to put it in their mouth and out to talk. Also when you buy one, even a youth size can sometimes be to long and could gag your child. I have in the past had to nip the end off. So don't just shove it in their mouth. You don't want them to be sick every time they see one.

Neck guard: (Not required, BUT can be a good idea.) Canada does require their players to wear neck guards as this is a vulnerable area where your child can be seriously injured. It is a good idea to look into purchasing a neck guard for your son or daughter.

Chest protector: (Not required for "learn to" skaters) Although this is not required for the "learn to" skaters, having the additional padding is a good idea. This can be accomplished by purchasing a chest protector, but really, an extra sweatshirt will do just fine.

Elbow pads: (Not required for "learn to" skaters) Recommended for falls even though most do not have far to go, it still hurts. Elbow pads and shin guards are probably the two most important pieces of equipment for young kids (aside from the helmet) as they fall often, and when falling, the knees and elbows tend to be the first place to hit the ice – meaning the most force is being put on those joints. It is a good idea to get some elbow pads.

Gloves: ("Learn to" skaters, I recommend hockey gloves) Anything warm will work, little hands get cold. Hockey gloves are very stiff. Wearing them and playing with them will loosen them up, play some street hockey, it helps. Or get a good pair of mittens or gloves you can always put a pair of stretchy gloves underneath any set of gloves to help keep hands warm. The best way to keep your little one's hands warm; keep them moving!

Nut Cup or pelvic protector: (Required at all levels) NO explanation necessary!

Breezers: (Not required for "learn to" skaters, but again falls hurt!) If they don't stay up, you can get suspenders.

Shin Guards: (Not required for "learn to" skaters)-Should go all the way to the top of the skates. You don't want to get hit with a stick or puck between the skate and the guard. Again, although not required, these are important pieces of equipment. Most falls center around the knees and elbows and as kids begin playing with pucks, sticks and pucks fly at your shins. I can tell you from experience that getting hit by either the stick or puck is not an enjoyable experience!

Hockey Socks: (Not required for "learn to" skaters) These sometimes stay up on their own, but there are a few choices to hold these up also. Velcro on the nut cup underwear (comes built in), girdle and tape.

Skates: Hockey skates should be the right size. Typically for my kids the youth skate sizes have been one size smaller than what their tennis shoes are. Size 13 tennis shoe would be a size 12 skate. To check have the child put their foot in an unlaced skate and slide their toe all the way forward till the toe touches and there should be just enough room to put an index finger behind the heel. This will give a little room to grow. Wearing these at home for a few hours is a good idea to help build the muscles needed to skate.

Skate sharpening is a matter of personal preference. Some NHL players sharpen their skates between each period while others sharpen them only a few times per season. Check your skates for any nicks, stripped or "rolled" edges after you skate. You will want to get your skates sharpened if that is the case.

What to wear under all the gear: There are many choices. For beginning skaters to stay warm long underwear, long sleeve t-shirt, sweat pants are a good start. Once they start coming off the ice sweating, we switched to Under Armor hot gear.

Sticks, Stick length, how to tape? Learn to skaters do not need a stick the first few practices. If you are purchasing a stick, get a straight blade! You never know which hand you should get your son or daughter. It doesn't make sense but a left-handed stick should (typically) be played by a right-handed dominate player. All of your strength and dexterity come from the top hand on the hockey stick (a "left-handed" stick means you have your right hand at the top and vice versa for a "right-handed" stick). This is confusing to many. If you get a straight-blade stick, you will find out shortly which way your child gravitates, then purchase them a curved blade. I would suggest waiting until at least Christmas before

doing that, and that's if your child is making it to practice often. When in doubt, ask the coach! That's what we're here for – to help these kids learn to love the game that we all enjoy so much!