

Are you new to ice hockey? Are your kids joining the WSYHA “Learn to Skate” or “Learn to Play” programs? Then this guide is for you!

Having the **right sized equipment** that is **worn properly** is **CRITICAL** for your child to learn quickly and to have fun! As a parent, it’s your job to know the details of the equipment so that your child can focus on learning the game. You will invest a lot of time and money over the years for your child to learn and enjoy the game – please spend the few minutes now to learn this information and get the most out of your investment.

The following website has a great overview of all the equipment your child will need:
<http://newtohockey.com/hockey-equipment-buying-guide-for-kids/>

But in the interest of saving you time, we have assembled our own summary of the key points about the needed equipment.

Hockey Equipment Guide for Kids



Cheat sheet for order to put on equipment:

- 1) Jock/Jill
- 2) Garter belt
- 3) Shin pads
- 4) Hockey socks
- 5) Hockey pants
- 6) Skates
- 7) Shoulder pads
- 8) Elbow pads
- 9) Neck guard
- 10) Mouthguard
- 11) Helmet
- 12) Gloves

Helmet (required for LTS/LTP) **and Facemask** (recommended for LTS; required for LTP)

Helmets are **required** for anyone on the ice. Children are much more susceptible to concussions than adults and they will fall often while learning to skate. Having a properly fitted helmet is critical.

- You must use a helmet with a facemask (also known as a “cage”) – as kids fall, their skates and sticks flail about, so their faces must be protected from injury
 - Helmets can be bought with a facemask or a facemask can be purchased separately, but not all facemasks fit all helmets – so make sure you have a compatible set when purchasing them separately
 - Helmets supplied by WSYHA will include a facemask
- The helmet should be snug on the head, but not to the point of being painful. The chin strap must be snug as well to make sure the helmet is in the correct position during a fall/collision and subsequent impact
 - Helmets are adjustable – but they usually require a screwdriver to adjust. This should be done in advance because it is sometimes a challenge to get it adjusted properly

Neckguard (recommended for LTP)

A neckguard is intended to protect against skate blade cuts to the neck. It is not provided by WSYHA, but it is recommended by USA Hockey. In many organizations, it is mandatory. Although incidents that can be prevented by a neckguard are rare, you should decide for your own child whether wearing a neckguard is appropriate.

Skates (required for LTS/LTP)

Skates are the most important piece of equipment to get right to ensure your child develops quickly and enjoys themselves.

- There are various types of ice skates available – make sure you find “ice hockey skates”:
 - If your child is 3 or 4 years old, you can buy Lil’ Champ skates with a single ratcheting plastic strap – these cost \$40 new



- If your child is 5 or older, they should have real hockey skates with laces – these cost \$50 new



- Skates **must** be sized correctly for your child.
 - While standing, the heel should be snug to the back of the boot and the toes should slightly brush the toe cap
 - Sizing a skate is always challenging for fast growing kids who can’t always give feedback about how well their foot fits inside of a skate
 - DO NOT buy larger skates so that your child can “grow into them” – trying to learn how to skate with ill-fitting skates will just ensure that your child learns slower relative to other kids
 - Depending on your child’s growth rate, you will need to buy new skates every 1 to 2 years
 - Skates vary in both length and width – check both before purchasing
 - Some amount of callousing will occur over time, but blisters should not occur and usually indicate that there is too much play in the boot (i.e. the skate is too big)
 - Skates that are too small will hurt immediately or just not go onto the foot

- There is no substitute for trying on skates at a store – if you travel north, try to find a hockey shop where you can try different sizes
- Skates must be tied snugly – they should not hurt, but they should not have slack that would allow the ankles to bend inwards

- This is bad:



these skates are either too big to begin with and/or not properly tightened

- This is good:



- Ensure that the eyelets on either side of the tongue are approximately 2 inches apart when the skate is tightened – this distance can also be used to gauge if the skates are too large or too small



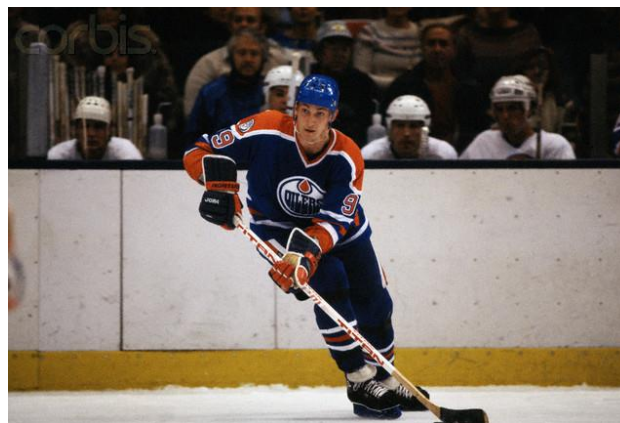
- Skates **must** be sharp!
 - Trying to skate on a dull or improperly sharpened skate is like trying to walk on ice in socks – it makes it really hard to learn to skate
 - Brand new skates come with no edges whatsoever and **must** be sharpened before use
 - Skate sharpening must be done with a special machine that is operated by a knowledgeable user
 - Skates should be sharpened once every few practices or when they have “lost an edge” due to contact with another skate or other hard object

- Inspect skates after each practice/game to see if there is any visible damage to the edges (each blade has an edge on either side) – running your finger **very lightly** along the edge allows you to feel for inconsistencies
- Teach your child to avoid stepping on anything other than the rubber mats and ice – especially avoid metal and concrete/asphalt
- Talk to the coach for pointers on how to tell when skates need a sharpening
- The recommended hollow for youth skates is at **most** ½ inch
- A full understanding of how skate sharpening works is not trivial, but it is also not rocket science – here is a good starter:
<http://newtohockey.com/beginners-guide-to-skate-sharpening/>

Hockey Stick (recommended for LTS; required for LTP)

Hockey sticks are available in Youth, Junior, Intermediate and Adult but usually need to be cut to the correct length for the player. Hockey sticks can be straight or curved to the left or right. WSYHA does not provide sticks, but a new Youth hockey stick can be purchased for \$25.

- Youth sticks are for ages 0 to 8, Junior for ages 7 to 13, Intermediate for 11-14 and Adult for over 14 (for overlaps, jump to the next category when child is above average weight e.g. for a heavy 7 year old, use a junior stick)
- Make sure you purchase the **correct** hockey stick and cut that down – each category has different blade length, shaft width and stiffness
 - For example, cutting down a Junior stick is not the same as cutting down a Youth stick! Using a longer blade or stiffer shaft will make it more difficult for your child to learn proper puck control and shooting skills
 - Sticks can be cut down with a hacksaw
- Proper stick length is **critical**; the stick (held vertically) should reach from the chest to the adam's apple while wearing skates
- Determining the proper curve direction for your child is **critical** and will be determined by how the child is most comfortable holding the hockey stick
 - If the right hand is at the top end of the shaft, then the blade should be a left curve; if the left hand is at the top end of the shaft, then the blade should be a right curve
 - As seen in the picture below, Wayne Gretzky uses a left handed stick



- Being right/left handed for writing does **not** directly correlate to which curve you should select – many people use opposite curves to their handedness and some even use the opposite grip for a golf club versus a hockey stick
- When first starting, your child can optionally use a straight stick until you can determine the correct curve direction
- There are many options for curve types (also known as a “pattern”); a ½ inch mid curve is a pretty good starting point; having too much of a curve makes it difficult to learn proper backhand technique
- If your child can go in either direction, research shows that having the dominant hand at the top of the stick gives the player a harder shot (i.e. use the opposite curve from their handedness)
- Stick butt ends and blades are usually taped with special “hockey stick tape” to maximize hand grip and puck grip, respectively; talk to the coach or search for a YouTube video to show you proper stick taping technique

Mouthguard (optional for LTS; recommended for LTP)

A mouthguard is useful for preventing dental damage and concussions. Obviously, if your child has a cage on their helmet, their teeth will be safe regardless, but there is still some benefit to having a mouthguard for preventing concussions. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to find mouthguards that fit for little kids, and it’s even harder to get them to use them. As a parent, you have to decide what is right for your child.

Hockey Gloves (recommended for LTS; required for LTP)

Hockey gloves not only keep the hands warm, but are **critical** for protecting against falls, stick contact and, most importantly, skate contact. When kids fall, they usually catch themselves with their hands thereby exposing their hands to the danger of being stepped on by another player's skate. Hockey gloves are critical to keep the hands safe – regular gloves do not. Kids should be taught that if their glove falls off, they need to put it back on immediately.

Hockey gloves are sized by length and should fit a little bit looser than a regular glove. The cuff of the glove should fully protect the wrist area. If purchasing used gloves, ensure that the palms are not worn out.

Shoulder Pads (recommended for LTS; required for LTP)

Shoulder pads serve to protect the shoulder, upper arms, chest, and back from contact with other players, pucks, the goal, and the boards. Shoulder pads may be worn directly on the skin, or a thin shirt/undergarment can be worn beneath them for warmth/comfort.

Elbow Pads (required for LTS/LTP)

Elbow pads protect the elbows from injury during falls. Make sure the elbow pads are sized to fit snugly enough that they don't move around during play. Falling on an elbow that is unprotected because the elbow pad has slid off is very painful and can result in serious injury to the elbow. Elbow pads usually do have a left and right as they may have extra padding on the outside of the arm to protect against stick contact.

Hockey Pants (strongly recommended for LTS; required for LTP)

More than just for covering up and warming the lower body, hockey pants have pads to cushion falls and protect from getting cut by skates. When learning to skate, having this extra cushion will keep kids from being afraid to fall and will serve to increase learning speed. Hockey pants should be sized to fit snugly while not restricting motion.

Shin Guards (strongly recommended for LTS; required for LTP)

"Shin guards" is a bit of a misnomer because they protect the knee just as much as the shins. They have strong plastic on the outside and soft cushions on the inside. They are often held in place by velcro straps but, if this does not adequately secure them, you should wrap some "shin guard tape" around the outside of the hockey sock to ensure they stay in place. Shin guards should sit just above the tongue of the hockey skate and

should be the correct length that the knee fits into the “donut” of the knee pad section. Shin pads do have a left and right indicated on the tag. If this indicator has worn off, a good rule of thumb is that the fastener side of the strap is usually on the outside of the leg.

Hockey Socks / Garter Belt (recommended for LTS; required for LTP)

If a child wears shin pads, they will need to wear hockey socks over top to keep them in place and to keep the legs warm. Hockey socks are usually held up by a garter belt, although some jocks/jills have a Velcro strip on the bottom that can also serve this purpose. The bottom line is that hockey socks need to be held up in some fashion or they will just slide down during play. In some cases, oversized sweat pants can be worn over top of shin pads instead of hockey socks.

Jock / Jill (recommended for LTS; required for LTP)

For boys, the jock will come with a protective cup to protect the crown jewels. For girls, there is either a cup or other padding to provide similar protection. As noted above, some jocks/jills come as undergarments and include a Velcro strip used to hold up the hockey socks (in lieu of a garter belt). Additional underwear may be worn underneath the jock/jill for added warmth/comfort.

Hockey Jersey (recommended for LTS; required for LTP)

A hockey jersey is made of special durable material to hold up to the rigors of hockey play while still allowing for air flow to keep kids from overheating. It should be sized to fit loosely over top of shoulder pads, but not so loose as to interfere with movement of the arms.

Halter (helpful for early LTS)

For kids that are first learning to skate, it may be helpful to use a halter like the one shown below. This is useful for parents and coaches to be able to lift the child easily after a fall. This is also useful for other sports like skiing or learning to ride a bike. The CoPilot LIFT Mutli-Sport Halter pictured below can be purchased for \$19.99 on Amazon.

