

Beginner's Guide to Outfitting Your New Hockey Player

Basic equipment includes the following:

- Long underwear for under hockey gear
 - Jock / Jill (optional garter belt to hold up socks)
 - Shin pads
 - Hockey socks
 - Hockey pants (optional suspenders)
 - Hockey skates
 - Shoulder pads
 - Elbow pads
 - Helmet with cage (use a strip of tape to write your child's name on the helmet)
 - Hockey gloves
 - Hockey stick (cut & taped)
 - Hockey duffle bag
- Optional Equipment:
- Mouth guard
 - Neck guard
 - Wrist guards
 - Helmet repair kit
 - Spare hockey tape (cloth tape for stick & plastic for shin pads)
 - Spare skate laces
 - Extra jersey
 - Skate towel (for wiping off excess snow from blades after practice)

Getting Dressed

All of the basic equipment has been listed in the order it is to be put on. Most of the equipment is self explanatory and often is marked left and right. Make sure everything is fitting snug but not so tight that it is cutting off circulation. The equipment can only do its job when it is in place and fastened securely. Hockey tape can be used to tighten up shin pads or any loose Velcro straps you may have.

Skate Sizing & Tightening

Sizing skates is slightly different from your standard shoe sizes. In most cases you want to go down at least a full size. Skates should fit snugly and can take some getting used to. You want to make sure your player's socks are not bunched up in the skates so the fit is true. Most young players are not strong enough to tie their own skates so parents will have to help for the first few years depending on how old your player is. Skate tightness is a bit of a personal preference, but they must be tight enough that your player is able to stand upright without his/her ankles bending inward.

If you are having any trouble getting them tight and keeping them tight throughout the ice session you can try wax laces. They are generally available at any hockey pro-shop. The one thing you do not want to do is wrap laces or tape around the ankle. Wrapping laces or tape takes away ankle mobility. We want to strengthen young player's ankles through power skating so that they do not need that crutch as they get older.

Skate Sharpening

Hockey skates need to be sharpened from time to time. Again, it comes down to personal preference. It depends how often your player skates and how hard he/she is on his blades. If your child complains of a "slipping" feeling or something just seems "off" they may have lost an edge. If this happens you will need to get the skates sharpened again to fix the issue. To make each sharpening last longer you can dry your player's skates off with a towel and put soft skate guards on them for storage and transportation. If you do not have skate guards slide the skates inside of your hockey pants so the blades do not get banged up during transportation.

Stick Care

Many young players want the flashiest and newest stick on the market but it is not necessary for them to begin playing and can be counter-productive. A wood stick with a small curve is more than fine. The composite sticks do not teach young players how to "feel" the puck when stick handling and passing. The benefit of a composite stick is the flex it has when shooting. No young player is strong enough yet for that benefit. The down side of a composite stick is that it has less feel while puck handling and passes are much harder to control. The recommended stick length is anywhere from the chin to the nose while standing off of skates. A small black or white cloth taped knob on the cut end of the stick will suit your player best. Big rubber knobs and butt-ends are not recommended because of small hands. We also recommend the same black or white cloth tape on the blade of the stick for increased puck control. If you are having trouble deciding what hand your player "shoots" simply hand him/her a stick and see which hand they grab it with. Whatever hand they have used should be the top hand on the stick. Most kids will tell you by banging around the house with mini-sticks or a street hockey stick.

Airing It Out

It is important to the longevity of the equipment that it is aired out after each use. Some people have a "hockey tree" or just lay it on the floor in front of a dehumidifier. Insoles to skates can be removed to help the rivets from rusting. Try to get your player into the routine of packing THEIR bag and being responsible for THEIR own equipment. Some people complain about stinky "hockey hands" and washing them just doesn't get rid of the smell -- shaving cream will take away that stink, but you must use the foam kind.

Try It On At Home

Not only is it good practice for your young player to try all his/her gear on ahead of time, but it will let you as a parent make sure everything fits and is in working order. There is nothing worse than getting to the rink and realizing you're missing a helmet screw or have a broken skate lace. These things will need to be replaced before your child takes the ice and could eat up precious ice time. This will also teach your young player responsibility for his/her equipment and to be prepared when it's time to go to the arena.

Fun

The most important thing is that your young player is having fun playing the sport. It is important as parents to give your child positive reinforcement when they do well. Also don't worry about goals and assists just that they give their best effort when on the ice. Promote team play and congratulate other players when they do well, not just your child. Most importantly tell them to work hard and have the most fun they can.