

When it comes to teaching young children to snowboard, why not step back in time and take a tip from Frankie and Annette? Use the toy that proved the hit of many a '50s beach party—the hula hoop.

That's right, those plastic rings that once tested the mettle of the sock-hop crowd are back. But now they serve a very different purpose—as teaching aids in kid's snowboarding lessons.

Hula hoops represent one of the many options available today to snowboard instructors who teach children. When incorporated into a snowboard lesson plan, a hula hoop not only adds an element of fun but also acts as a stabilizer. The application is quite easy. While facing the student, simply place the hula hoop around his or her body at waist level. With the hula hoop against the student's lower back and the majority of the hoop in front of the student, have the student comfortably grasp the sides in front of him or her. Now, imagine, if the hoop were gone, the student would have an upright, preferred posture for snowboarding.

With the hula hoop thus in place you are able to do many things. On flat terrain you can use the hoop to pull the student around to introduce him or her to the concepts of balance and stance while gliding. On a slight incline, the hoop can be used to provide physical assistance (i.e., something to hold onto) as the student develops balance and edging skills. On all types of beginner terrain, the hoop is a useful teaching aid because it helps the student develop a feeling of security as well as a reference point to recall the proper body position and mechanics for turning the board.

Instructors who have tried the hula hoop approach have found it beneficial on several levels. It can be used to teach children proper body position, balance, and stance while offering many places for the instructor to hold onto and physically assist the student. Such physical assistance helps prevent falls, thus reducing the risk of injury.

# CREATE HIGH HOOPS FOR KIDS

BY MARK FARMER



SNOWBOARD EDUCATION TEAM MEMBER PAUL NASCHAK USES A HULA HOOP WHEN TEACHING HIS FOUR-YEAR-OLD SON, MATTHEW, TO SNOWBOARD.

By using a hula hoop to assist student movement you can also maintain the flow of the lesson. At the beginning of the lesson, you can use the hoop to orient the student to proper body position and the feeling of gliding. As the lesson progresses, guide the student into a turn by turning the hoop like a steering wheel as the student holds onto the sides of the hoop. By the end of the lesson, the child is often able to hold the hoop by himself or herself and “steer” turns without assistance.

In addition, because you are able to use the hoop as a means of providing “hands-on” assistance that influences student movement, you can also prevent the student from developing bad habits such as counter rotation, asymmetrical turns, and an inability to control speed.

The toy also acts to shift the student's focus away from the fact that both feet are “locked” onto the same plane. The hoop, in essence, takes the student's mind off his or her feet, allowing the child to simply have a good time while making proper turns.

All these elements of hula hoop use are valuable, but perhaps the most important benefit provided by this timeless toy is its ability to foster a fun learning environment for students. And after all, fun is what the sport is all about, especially for pint-sized riders. ♦

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