

THE KITEBOARDER

Tips from a 6th Grader: The Family that Kites Together Has More Fun Together!

Emmet Sproul was TKB's featured Profile rider in the Winter 2012 issue. An extremely passionate rider who is just 12-years-old, Emmet wanted to share his stoke with others, especially kids and parents who might be a bit apprehensive about their children learning to kiteboard at an early age. All photos courtesy the Sproul family and Jimmi Hepp..



I am a sixth grade kiteboarder and I would like to share my kiteboarding experiences with you. My name is Emmet Sproul and I have been kiteboarding since I was nine years old. I am currently 12 and I kite on the snow and the water. I have learned a lot about kiteboarding in three years and would like to share my thoughts with the kids and families out there who are considering learning how to kite.

The perception of kiting to most people is very extreme and I am here to tell you that it does not need to be that way at all. Granted there are some dangers but with the proper instruction and diligence with the safety rules, kiting can be very safe. Skiing is a good comparison because skiing can be at a very high level or it can be mellow where you just cruise. Also, families can kite together like they ski together. My Dad has been kiting since the early days of the sport and I wanted to learn, so my Mom and I learned together. Now we all go on kiting trips as a family and we all think it is an amazing sport. It really makes my whole family and every kiteboarder feel great to kite with your friends and family and just have a great time! There are however a few things to know beforehand.

Getting Started

Probably the most important factor when learning how to kite is to start by finding a good certified kite school. There are many great family-oriented locations all over the world to learn to kite on snow as well as water. A professional instructor will get you started in the safest and fastest way possible. My instructor Anton Rainold of Colorado Kite Force, is an amazing teacher based in Frisco, Colorado and would be happy to get you started on the snow.

When starting, you will most likely learn to fly a trainer kite and that will teach you how to steer the kite. It also helps you learn the key basics of kite flying. One of the most important lessons to pay attention to is safety. Familiarity and use of the release and safety systems is critical to your life. The first thing that I learned is how to release my kite.

Tips for Kids

Kiteboarding has a very different learning curve for kids than adults. Kids are generally a lot lighter than most adults so they need the smaller kite sizes. They also might not be able to stay in the water for as long as adults can because they can get colder faster or they might get scared. Some kids can't stay focused as long as adults, so it's harder for them to pay attention for long periods of time. Also, it might take longer to learn as a kid because every day might not be the day for you to kite in certain weather conditions. Never get discouraged though because you will always make it if you keep trying and don't be shy to tell your instructor that you are scared or you don't want to go kiting because you didn't sleep or you are tired from school or something like that.

Another tip that can really help kids is to train them on shorter lines to decrease power. For instance, instead of the normal 25-meter kite lines, try going down to 15 or 20-meter lines. Kids can also go in less wind than adults. They will have less of a range as well; lighter people get over-powered more easily.

Kids need to use a lot of caution because it is more dangerous for them due to their size and weight. Proper safety equipment is extremely important. A quality line knife, life jacket, helmet and signaling whistle are all required to stay out of trouble. It may seem like it is really dangerous at this point, but it is not that bad at all. If your kid wants to learn to kite don't be scared but do be smart in choosing a reputable school and instructor! It is all about good solid instruction and learning how to use the safety equipment that keeps this sport a safe one. As a kid, learning a sport like kiteboarding is awesome but when you do it with family, it takes the fun factor to a whole new level.

Snow vs. Water

Snow and water are very different but they are both a boatload of fun. The equipment is the same, so you don't have to buy a ton of new equipment to do both. Some snowkiters prefer to use foil kites because they can fly in less wind and are lighter and more compactable. Foil kites are not inflatable and cannot be dropped in the water, so their use on snow is preferable. Lots of people do both. Some people are dedicated to one or the other. Kids who are comfortable in the water learn well in the water. Kids who are not too comfortable in the water tend to learn better on snow. Young people and families should consider learning at a school with a rescue boat or lifeguarded area. No need to worry about these things on the snow. You can usually just walk back to where you started.



Emmet first learned to kite on snow and now loves to snowkite race.

My family all agrees that it is easier to learn first on the snow because you can learn to fly the kite before you have to learn how to deal with the water as well. On the snow you can stand up if you fall and you don't need to deal with sinking or swimming.

Snowkiting can be done on skis, snowboards or anything that you can use at a ski area. If you learn on the water, you will need to learn how to get up on the board while flying your kite and how to body drag to your board when you fall. Getting up in the water is similar to getting up on a wakeboard. I first learned to kite on the snow and really enjoyed it.

Learning on Snow/Water

Families and their kids can learn safely with the proper equipment and location. Learning to kite on the water is usually the safest and most comfortable for the student in shallow water. South Padre Island, Texas has an enormous flat-water area where you can always touch bottom. I really enjoy kiting at South Padre because of the flat water. The north flats at South Padre is a also a great place for kids to learn to kite on the water. Jason Norwood From SPI Kiteboarding helped me a lot there.

Learning on the snow also has its advantages. You are closer to your instructor and it is much more social than learning on water. It is also easier to learn to kite on snow. It is even more fun if you are with family as everyone learns together! There are lots of places to go where all you need to know is how to "mow the lawn." In a way it is like snow skiing because there are tons of people who ski as a family and ski at the intermediate level. Because you get results quicker on the snow it becomes more fun faster. Having fun and success as soon as possible is very important for kids and families, just like snow skiing. The sooner that it's fun the more everyone will want to do it. You can take your family on a trip, learn in two days and then be set and enjoy it forever, which I think is the coolest. Even if you never become experts it will always be fun to go and snowkite as a family at an intermediate level. Taking your snowkite skills to water is a simple transition because all the kite flying skills are already there. You don't have to worry about flying the kite, just riding the board. So learning on snow can simplify learning on water.

Salt vs. Fresh Water Kiting

Once you have learned the basics and enjoy water kiting, it can be done on salt and fresh water. Fresh water is fun and usually flatter than salt water. It does not affect your equipment as much as salt water but it can be cold and gusty in certain places. Salt water has a few more complexities that can be both fun and a hassle. Salt water can have waves and a lot of people really enjoy that factor. I really like to kite in the waves. There is usually current

and a wide variety of sea life to contend with in the ocean. On Maui, avoiding turtles can be a challenge. Salt water is more buoyant and the ocean is usually less gusty. On salt or fresh water, there can be the possibility of you floating or drifting away. This is why learning how to self-rescue is important. Self-rescue can be fun. You can actually lie on your kite comfortably and sail it to shore. I have had to self-rescue several times on both fresh and salt water.

Kiting on salt or fresh water is a personal preference and one is not better than the other. My favorite is to kite on the ocean, but freshwater is fine if there is no ocean available. It's still kiteboarding!

Places to Kite

There are a lot of great destinations to kite for riders of all levels. When you are looking for a place to go kiting, make sure that there are other activities to do in case there is no wind. Kiting needs wind but even the windiest of spots have times when there just isn't any. Summit County, Colorado is a great place to come and snowkite because there is good wind. But if not, there are a lot of different things to do for the whole family like skiing, sledding, snowshoeing, ice skating, shopping and dining out. Hawaii is a great place to water kite because there are more places to go than you could explore in two years! There are many websites such as windguru.com, which will tell you what the wind is doing in specific places. There are also different websites that specialize in where to go kiting for consistent wind and other features like food, lodging and entertainment. Going different places with your family to kite is very exciting as a kid because you get to experience these new places and be with your family to enjoy it together.



Got all their gear packed. Where's the wind?

Styles

There are many ways to find your own groove through different styles and equipment types. Some of the kiteboarding disciplines consist of freeride, freestyle, waves, wake-style and racing. There are a wide variety of kites and boards to accompany your style of riding. Some kites are more hardcore than others and require all of your attention, while other kites, like wave kites, are more user-friendly. My favorite kite is the Ozone Reo because it is a super user friendly kite. Wakeboarding is very similar to wake style kiteboarding because you can do all of the same tricks. There are also a lot of board options like surfboards, twin tips, and skim boards that change up the riding experience. I really like to ride a surfboard with no footstraps in the waves. If it is flat, a skim board really amuses me while trying new things. Kiteboarding is a great way for kids to find and share their own personal style and expression. I have found my style and expressing it through snow and water kiting makes me feel very free to do whatever I want. Kids are the perfect people to discover the future of kiteboarding with new styles and tricks because kiteboarding is still developing.

Racing/FreeSailing

Racing and free sailing are both lots of fun and can be done on both snow and water. Kite racing is becoming very popular and is building on yacht racing traditions. Free riding is a great way to express yourself in a new way. I find that when I race I am very nervous but still really enjoy it. After the race I really like to go out on my surfboard and just cruise around to relieve myself of my race stress. Free riding today is the most popular style of kiting and it is my personal favorite. Kiting is known as kiteboarding, kite surfing or snow kiting and is actually a very high performance and complex version of sailing. Kiting IS sailing! Kids can learn and develop their focus through racing and competitions and that is a great way to develop their kiteboarding. I really enjoy racing and competing — not everyone does but they still love kiting!

Family Fun

I think that it is the most awesome experience in the world to kite with my Dad in the waves on Maui. Plus, if I get in trouble, he is there to help me to shore. My Mom kites too and it is pretty cool seeing her out there having a blast with us! One of my favorite sessions that I have ever had is the day that my mom, dad and I went up to kite in the waves for the first time and we had a blast! I can not think of a time when I did anything more fun than kite with my family.



Emmet sharing his stoke with friend Peter Grant at the Naish Race Series in Maui this past summer. Photo Jimmi Hepp

Wrap Up

If you are a kid or any person out there, I highly advise that you try kiteboarding and that you have fun going through the process of safely learning how to kite! I am very glad that I learned as a kid. It can be huge commitment to learn but any family or kid can do it and it's worth the effort. What you get from the learning process is very rewarding and you will not regret it. All the modern equipment is very reliable and has continued to change and improve throughout kiting history. Kiting is an epic way to spend time with your family while having fun together in many awesome different places! There are so many different types and styles of kiting that your family can all be into different styles but still have great fun. My family is all different but we still have the best time in the world out in the ocean and on the snow kiting together. If you have ever thought about kiting I encourage you to get out there and try because I promise you will be rewarded with the best sport ever!

Emmet Sproul lives in Breckenridge, Colorado and is sponsored by Ozone, Dakine, Crazyfly, ColoradoKiteForce, and Mom and Dad