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When can youth safely participate in snowmobiling?

Snowmobiling can be an activity enjoyed by all members of the family. Young people of all ages and abilities are at risk as operators, passengers, and pedestrians during snowmobile operation. The research suggests young people's risk for injury while snowmobiling is highest when not supervised by a responsible adult; at dawn, dusk, and dark; frozen bodies of water; and when there is increased probability of encountering snowmobilers operating under the influence of alcohol. Snowmobile-related injuries to young people are often a result of risk-taking behaviors (excessive speed, alcohol use, and night-time driving by adults).

The age of the young person should be used only as a guideline. Remember, all young people develop and mature at different rates. A youth's physical development and maturity determines his or her ability to perform certain tasks safely. When young people are growing, there are many different levels of physical development and maturity. Some children may not be ready to safely participate in snowmobiling.

The final decision to allow a young person to operate a snowmobile depends on the parental assessment of the youth's ability to safely operate the snowmobile. Additional questions about the use of snowmobiles by young people can be directed to the manufacturer, state snowmobile administering agency, certified safety trainers, or your health care provider.

For young people to operate a snowmobile, consider the *Essential characteristics, Experience, Equipment, and Environment* in making your decision. The following is a guide to assist you in the process.

Consider the ESSENTIAL characteristics of the young person:

- Desire to operate a snowmobile.
- Balance and muscle strength to hold the proper position on the snowmobile.
- Ability to comprehend basic instructions and follow directions.
- Ability to support a fitted, approved protective helmet.

Consider the EXPERIENCE of the youth:

Every snowmobile experience should begin with a certified training course that provides the youth with the opportunity to:

- Understand the workings, maintenance, preparation and repair of the snowmobile.
- Develop skills and practice of safe operation on snow.
- Know the procedures of winter survival and emergency preparedness.
- Learn local/state regulations, courtesy, and ethics of snowmobiling.

Every young person should be observed over a period of time in a controlled environment before heading out for an extended trail ride. As proficiencies are demonstrated, endurance, and capabilities, greater responsibility can be given.

Consider the EQUIPMENT:

Snowmobile:

- Select a suitable sized machine to operate safely that includes the proper horsepower and easy access to controls. The snowmobile should be designed for one person.
- Children should not be responsible for transporting passengers.
- Maintain the snowmobile in good working condition.
- Provide emergency equipment (matches, water, flashlight, tow rope), cold-weather gear (extra clothing, sleeping bag, shelter), tools and replacement parts.

Youth:

- Outfit the young person with appropriate personal protective equipment for riding conditions. Equipment should include certified helmet with face protection, layers of warm clothing and protection of arms and legs.

Consider the ENVIRONMENTAL conditions:

- Operate snowmobiles on trails that are groomed, maintained, and appropriate for safe use. Avoid frozen bodies of water and extreme terrain where speed and control can be an issue.
- Operate snowmobiles during times of best visibility. Avoid dawn, dusk, and dark.
- Avoid times when there is increasing probability of encountering snowmobilers operating under the influence of alcohol.
- Obey local and state laws provided by the jurisdiction.
- Plan ahead with weather and trail conditions that enhance safe operation.
- Respect private property, trail boundaries, wildlife and other snowmobiles.
- Decision to operate should be made daily in relation to climatic and trail conditions.

Many of the same guidelines should be considered for children as passengers on snowmobiles.

As a responsible adult supervising a young person who snowmobiles, you should:

- Establish the safest conditions, environment and proper equipment.
- Role model safe behavior.
- Set safe expectations and limits that are age- and developmentally- appropriate.
- Provide a certified training class and periodic review of information and safety guidelines. Snowmobile safety training for young people younger than 16 years has not been evaluated to determine the effect on snowmobile-related injury to youths.
- Join a snowmobile club that provides family-oriented activities in a safe, alcohol-free environment.
- Provide continued supervision and encouragement for safe operation.

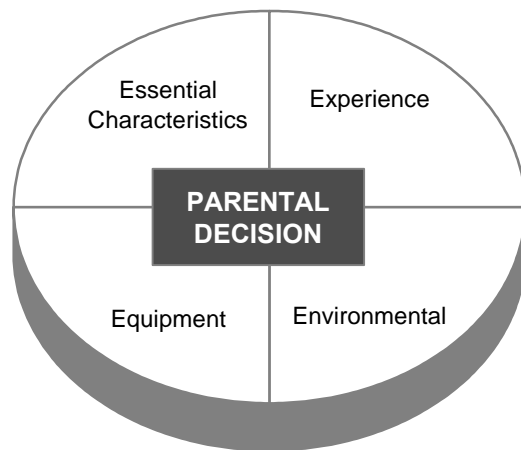
Consider the **ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS, EXPERIENCE, EQUIPMENT, and ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS** when deciding if a young person should operate a snowmobile.

Consider these facts:

- Twenty percent of all snowmobile-related injury victims are younger than 16 years.
- Youth snowmobile injuries cost nearly \$8000 per injury and the annual cost of snowmobile injuries is over \$84 million
- There are over 1.3 million snowmobiles registered in the United States
- A snowmobile can weigh in excess of 600 pounds and travel at speeds of 90 miles per hour. At 90 miles per hour, a snowmobile moves at 131 feet per second. With a standard reaction time of 1.5 seconds, a snowmobile will travel 195 feet before coming to a stop.

Additional questions about the proper use of snowmobiles by youths can be directed to the snowmobile manufacturer, your state snowmobile administering agency, certified safety trainers, or your health care provider.

Snowmobile-related injuries to young people are often a result risk-taking behaviors (excessive speed, alcohol use, and night-time driving) by adults.



For more information contact:

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