

Teaching Ski Lessons in a COVID World – Tips and Considerations from the CSIA

There is no question that the onset of COVID-19 has and will continue to present challenges in our world of ski teaching as we enter this new season. “Safe teaching” will take on a new meaning as Ski Instructors return to their passion of providing amazing skiing experiences to Snow School guests across the country.

This winter, teaching skiing could have more positive impact on public health and well-being than we have ever considered before. Being active, getting outside and having positive growth experiences are proven ways to stay healthy, both physically and mentally.

As an integral part of creating positive and safe experiences, we as Ski Instructors will need to open our minds, change behaviours and do everything we can to sustain the viability of the Ski Industry through this season and beyond. The importance of this can't be understated.

Here are some ideas to help you plan for and execute an incredible lesson with COVID-19 considerations in mind.

- 1) As with any and every season, know your Resort(s) protocols, so that you can be safe at work and help to maintain a safe and comfortable environment for your lesson participants and guests at large at the Resort. This is a “new world” for everyone, so if you are uncertain, be sure to ask.
- 2) Remember, your guests want to have a good time and enjoy themselves and so do you. These ski experiences may be just the break they need from the stress of the last number of months, so be sure to address the obvious with your guests, but don't dwell on it. Have an honest conversation about how everyone can and should cooperate to ensure mutual safety and comfort (based on Resort guidelines) and then set about making their day! Some topics to address might be:
 - a. Face covering guidelines.
 - b. Physical distancing on the mountain, in lift lines and on lifts.
 - c. How to stop as a group.
 - d. Communication methods (face coverings can make everyone harder to hear, your first language may not be theirs).
- 3) Plan ahead and collaborate with your guests. Some considerations:
 - a. Breaks will likely be necessary so know the protocols for entering indoor areas, warming up, washroom breaks etc. For longer lessons, plan breaks ahead of time.

- b. If teaching children, be sure to discuss break and finish times as well as meeting spots with parents.
 - c. Double check that everyone has a face covering before the lesson starts.
 - d. Most new protocols, capacity limitations, etc. can be handled much easier when you expect it and have enough time.
 - e. Lift riding at Resorts may have changed and could affect the time it takes to get onto a lift, how many people can ride together etc. Know these protocols before you go.
 - f. Safely pack an extra face covering or two in your pocket so you can switch when you need to stay comfortable.
- 4) As you know, falling down is a likelihood for Beginner skiers and physically helping them get up off the snow is likely not allowed for now. So, before they do fall, spend some time in a controlled environment teaching them how to put on and take off their equipment and how to safely fall down and get up off the snow by themselves. It can be frustrating for guests when they struggle to get up, so making it fun while reminding them that this is all part of the experience can help alleviate the stress in the moment.
- 5) Choose your terrain wisely. Skiing backwards in front of someone holding their hands or poles to control their speed and direction is a thing of the past (for now), so take terrain steps cautiously, so as to avoid the need to physically interact with a guest to keep them safe. Make speed and direction control the benchmarks of moving on in your lesson.
- 6) Getting close to a guest to move them around and help them understand what part of their body to move and how to move it is going to be tough, so here are some ways you can get your points across:
- a. Have your guests put their hands on the part of their body you want them to move, then have them try the movement statically before trying it while they slide.
 - b. Make your demonstrations clear and visible at all times.
 - c. Keep them moving as much as possible. This is just good for learning anyway, but this also lowers the amount of face-to-face time you engage in.
- 7) Family Lessons and Privates are more likely as skiers are encouraged to stay in their “bubbles”, so you may find yourself teaching parents and children in the same lesson more than in the past.
- a. Collaboration is key. Set expectations early to help everyone feel safe, but also so that they understand how you may need to work with them as a diverse group. For example, you may have to spend more time with the younger kids and you may even need to employ the parents’ help in some situations, so be sure to help the adults understand how they can assist.
 - b. Be realistic about the goals of the lesson and remember, safety is always first.

- c. Remember, if they have fun together it's a win, so do your best to set a light tone with realistic expectations. For young families, this could be the year they become skiers for life thanks to you!
 - d. Cut yourself a break! Teaching Beginners is hard work so be ready for that. Also recognize that the dynamics of parents and children together in a lesson can add complexities that you just can't predict or control, so stay positive and if all else fails just keep them safe. You'll get there!
- 8) Be empathetic and understanding, but be diligent. Remember that your guests are looking to you to help them learn and have a great time. Some may buy in to the health guidelines and protocols and some may not. It is important not to judge anyone or try to force compliance, but rather be a model of diligence yourself. If you are having trouble with a guest, approach a Supervisor with your concerns.
- 9) Smiles say a lot and with face coverings on this important communication tool becomes invisible, so be sure to stay vocal often and engage your learners verbally. Particularly with children, making sure they know that you are smiling and excited for them is comforting and confidence inspiring. Here are some additional ideas:
- a. Try verbalizing your emotions (ie. "that totally made me smile!").
 - b. Be animated and use gestures.
 - c. Speak slower and clearer.
 - d. Check in with your students regularly, because their smile is hidden too.
- 10) Look after yourself. Your physical and mental health and safety is ultimately important, so stay in touch with how you are feeling and address any uncomfortable or potentially unsafe situations with your Supervisor. Like anything new, this might take time to get used to and to get good at, so expect it and give it some time and practice. Your peers will be experiencing the same thing, so be sure to support each other.
- 11) Enjoy yourself!