

# ***Nurturing the Next Generation of Paddleboard Racers***

As both a race coach and a mother of three, I have seen first-hand the transformative power of getting children out on the water. Paddleboarding is more than a sport — it's an opportunity for young people to build confidence, develop resilience, and experience the joy of movement in nature. Over the past decade, I've had the privilege of racing alongside my children, and while it has required motivation and organisation, the rewards have been immeasurable.

For clubs and families alike, the question is often *how* to introduce children to paddleboard racing in a way that excites and sustains their interest. My experience suggests a few guiding principles that can make all the difference.

## **Planting Seeds for the Future**

By making paddleboarding accessible, social, and fun, we do more than create the next generation of racers—we inspire a lifelong love of the water. Children who grow up paddling learn to value resilience, patience, and teamwork. They discover how to push their limits while celebrating the joy of being outdoors.

If we want the sport to thrive, it's essential that we nurture young talent in a way that is inclusive and inspiring. With creativity, structure, and a commitment to fun, paddleboard racing can become not only a competitive outlet but also a powerful tool for building confident, capable, and adventurous young people.



# How to Get Kids Hooked on Paddleboard Racing

## 1. Make it Fun

The golden rule is simple: every session must be enjoyable. Children are drawn to laughter, play, and shared energy—adults too, for that matter. Training sessions should be designed around engaging games that encourage balance, coordination, and teamwork. Within these playful moments, coaches can introduce small doses of technique, skills, and drills, seamlessly weaving learning into the fun.

### Game ideas:

- Follow the Leader
- Mini Paddle Races
- Chase the Duck
- Treasure Hunts
- Magnet Fishing
- Tag on the Water
- Balance Circles
- SUP Water Polo / Football
- Paddle in Different Positions (backwards, kneeling, prone)
- Team Games: 2, 3, or 4 on a board
- On and Off the Board Races



## 2. Grow with their Skills

As children mature and their abilities progress, sessions can gradually shift towards more structured training. Technique, stamina, and discipline all become increasingly important, but the emphasis should always remain on enjoyment. A skilled instructor will recognise when a child is ready for more technical input and when they simply need the freedom to play.



### 3. Add challenges

Children love a sense of achievement. Mix in playful but structured challenges that push their skills just enough.

- Short races, adapted for ability
- Obstacle courses on water
- Balance and agility tasks
- Timed challenges
- Reward effort and progress

**Tip:** Celebrate everything — whether it's a new skill, great teamwork, or just trying hard. Positive reinforcement and fun rewards (like SUP award badges) keep motivation high.

### 4. Embrace the Adventure

Turn every session into an exploration. Kids love stories and discovery—make the water their playground.

- Give names to landmarks (e.g. "Crocodile Creek" or "Stoney Island")
- Explore wildlife and natural features
- Paddle to a secret spot to build a fire or cook food
- Collect "treasures" along the way
- Litter picks to care for the environment



## 5. Keep it Flexible

Have a session plan, but be ready to adapt. Follow the kids' energy—some days they'll want full-on games, other days calm exploration.

## 6. Prioritise Safety

Safety keeps the fun going. If kids feel secure, they'll keep coming back.

- Always use properly fitting buoyancy aids
- Kids-sized race boards and paddles make a huge difference
- Start with short sessions, gradually build stamina
- Teach water safety and respect for the environment
- Keep them warm—once they get cold, the fun ends fast!

## 7. Foster Community and Belonging

One of the greatest strengths of our club is that children train at the same time as adults. This shared environment fosters a sense of community, and it gives young paddlers role models to look up to. As their skills develop, many children naturally choose to join in with adult sessions, or move between the two depending on their stamina and concentration. This flexibility helps them feel both challenged and supported.



## 8. Planting Seeds for the Future

By making paddleboarding accessible, social, and fun, we do more than create the next generation of racers—we inspire a lifelong love of the water. Children who grow up paddling learn to value resilience, patience, and teamwork. They discover how to push their limits while celebrating the joy of being outdoors.

If we want the sport to thrive, it's essential that we nurture young talent in a way that is inclusive and inspiring. With creativity, structure, and a commitment to fun, paddleboard racing can become not only a competitive outlet but also a powerful tool for building confident, capable, and adventurous young people.

## 9. Be an Inspiring Instructor

The coach sets the tone. Enthusiasm is contagious.

- Get qualified through a regulated Awarding Organisation
- Learn from great coaches—watch, listen, and borrow their best practices
- Show consistency, patience, and care
- Be a role model: fit, reliable, safe, and positive
- Most importantly: **be happy and let your passion shine**

When kids see paddleboarding as play, challenge, and adventure, they'll fall in love with the sport—and racing will come naturally.

Anna is a mum of three energetic boys with a background in PE teaching and running sports camps for kids. Anna now runs her own business as an Exercise Specialist, helping people get active, free from injury and enjoy movement. When not training clients or being a kids taxi, you'll find Anna climbing mountains, cycling, paddleboarding, or supporting Northern SUP Race Club.

