

HOMESCHOOL GOLF ACADEMY

Junior Caddy Program

When Should a Junior Start Caddying?

Age · Physical Readiness · Work Permits · Minor Labor Law · Parent Guide

A downloadable family resource from the HSGA Junior Caddy Program

One of the most common questions parents and students ask about the Junior Caddy Program is simple: When is my child ready to start? The answer involves age, physical readiness, emotional maturity — and in many cases, legal requirements about working as a minor that families need to understand before their student's first loop.

This guide covers everything you need to know to start caddying at the right time, the right way, and with the right paperwork in place.

Age and Readiness: A Practical Guide

Four stages from preparation to full earning potential

Ages 10–11 · Too Young for Most Courses, But Not Too Young to Prepare

Build the foundation now — the loops will come

Most golf courses — even those with junior caddy programs — will not hire caddies under age 12. Many set their minimum at 13 or 14. At 10 or 11, the physical demands of carrying a 25–35 lb. bag for 18 holes across 4–5 miles of terrain are genuinely significant for a child who has not yet started their growth phase.

That said, ages 10–11 are ideal for preparation:

- Complete this program and earn the HSGA Junior Caddy Certificate
- Walk the golf course as a player or observer to build course knowledge
- Practice carrying a loaded bag short distances to build endurance
- Study club categories, terminology, and the distance charts in Module 1
- Shadow a parent, sibling, or family friend who caddies

A student who completes their preparation at age 10 and begins caddying at 12 will be dramatically better prepared than one who shows up at 14 with no background. Use the time.

Ages 12–13 · The Earliest Realistic Start for Most Students

First loops possible — with parental involvement and the right facility

Ages 12 and 13 represent the earliest realistic start for most junior caddies. Some courses accept caddies from age 12 — particularly courses with structured junior caddy programs designed specifically for this age group. Others set their minimum at 13 or 14.

At this age, students are typically capable of carrying a single bag for 18 holes if they are physically active and reasonably fit — but parents should monitor fatigue carefully in the first several loops.

What works well at 12–13:

- Starting with a **single bag** — never double-bag in the first season
- Choosing courses with established **junior caddy programs** that provide structure and mentorship
- Beginning on shorter or less hilly courses to build endurance gradually

- Having a parent available for pickup immediately after loops in early weeks

Important: In most U.S. states, 12 and 13-year-olds face significant restrictions on paid employment. See the work permit section below for specifics.

Ages 14–15 · The Sweet Spot for Starting

Old enough for most programs, young enough to build a full career before college

Ages 14 and 15 represent the sweet spot for starting a caddy career. Most golf courses with caddy programs accept applicants at 14. The physical demands are manageable for most 14–15 year olds with reasonable fitness. Starting here leaves two to four years before college to build experience, reputation, and earnings.

At 14, students in most U.S. states can obtain a work permit and begin paid employment under specific restrictions. At 15, those restrictions are often slightly relaxed. Both ages are fully viable for productive caddy work.

Goals for the first season starting at 14–15:

- Complete 10–15 loops in the first season — quality over quantity
- Build relationships with 2–3 regular players who request you by name
- Learn the course inside out: yardages, green breaks, landing zones
- Earn meaningfully: \$50–\$100 per loop with tips is realistic in the first season
- Set a goal for the second season: move toward double-bagging

Ages 16+ · Full Access, Maximum Earning Potential

Work permit restrictions ease significantly — prime time to go all in

At 16, most work permit restrictions in the United States are significantly relaxed or eliminated for non-hazardous employment — and caddying qualifies as non-hazardous in every state. A 16-year-old caddy can typically work more hours, on more days, and without the scheduling restrictions that apply at younger ages.

The 16+ advantage:

- No work permit required in most states
- Eligible for more loops per day and per week
- Physically capable of consistent double-bagging
- Old enough to drive to the course independently in many cases
- Strong reputation-building time before college applications

A student who started at 14 and is now 16 should be moving toward double-bagging, private club assignments, and being requested by name. The compounding of two seasons of reputation is a genuine advantage.

Physical Readiness

What to honestly assess before the first loop

Age is a starting point, not the whole answer. Physical readiness matters as much as the number of birthday candles. Before a student attempts their first loop, work through this honest assessment:

Readiness Factor	What to Assess	Minimum Threshold
Endurance	Can your student walk 5 miles comfortably without stopping?	Yes — comfortably, not barely

Carrying capacity	Can they carry a 25–30 lb. bag for 90+ minutes without pain?	Practice carries on flat ground first
Heat tolerance	Can they work actively in 85°F+ weather for 4 hours?	Hydration habits and heat acclimatization
Focus duration	Can they stay attentive and present for a 4–5 hour round?	Essential — distraction is a safety and service issue
Terrain pace	Can they walk quickly over hills, slopes, and rough ground?	Golf courses are not flat — terrain matters

★ **The Practical Test Before the First Loop**

Load a school backpack to 20–25 lbs. and walk 18 holes (or approximately 5 miles) with your student before their first caddy loop. If that goes comfortably — they feel good at the end, no shoulder or back pain, maintained a reasonable pace throughout — one real loop is the right next step. If it was genuinely hard, build more endurance first.

Working as a Minor — What Families Need to Know

Federal law, work permits, hour restrictions, and state variation

⚠ **Important Legal Notice**

Child labor laws vary significantly by state. The information below reflects federal law under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and common state-level patterns — but **your state's specific rules may be stricter than federal minimums**. Always verify the rules for your specific state before your student begins paid work. Contact your state's Department of Labor or visit their official website for the exact requirements where you live.

Federal Law: The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)

The FLSA sets the national baseline for youth employment. States may add restrictions but cannot be less protective than federal law.

FLSA Youth Employment Summary

- **Under 14:** Generally limited to working for a parent's business, babysitting, or casual work. Formal employment is very restricted. Golf caddying may be permitted in some states under specific exemptions, but is not clearly addressed in federal law at this age. Check your state.
- **Ages 14–15:** May work in non-hazardous, non-manufacturing, non-mining jobs. Specific hour restrictions apply. A work permit is required in most states.
- **Ages 16–17:** May work unlimited hours in non-hazardous occupations. Golf caddying is classified as non-hazardous. Some states still require work permits but hour restrictions are generally lifted.
- **Age 18+:** Full adult employment status. No youth employment restrictions apply.

Hour Restrictions for 14 and 15-Year-Olds

Period	Hours Permitted Under Federal Law
During the school year	No more than 3 hours on a school day No more than 18 hours in a school week No earlier than 7 a.m. · No later than 7 p.m.
During summer (June 1 – Labor Day)	No more than 8 hours per day No more than 40 hours per week No earlier than 7 a.m. · No later than 9 p.m.

Practical implication for caddies	A full 18-hole loop takes 4–5 hours. During summer, this is fully within permitted hours. During the school year, loops must be on weekends or school holidays to stay within the 3-hour school day limit.
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Is Caddying Classified as Hazardous Work?

Under federal law, golf caddying is **not** listed among the Hazardous Occupations Orders — the specific job categories restricted for minors. This means caddying is generally considered permissible employment for minors who meet the age and hour requirements.

However, some states have their own hazardous occupation lists that may differ from federal classifications. Always check your specific state before your student begins paid work.

Work Permits: What They Are and How to Get One

Most states require minors under 16 (and some states under 18) to obtain a work permit — formally called an Employment Certificate or Age Certificate — before beginning paid work.

Typical Work Permit Process

- **Step 1:** Obtain an application form — typically from your school's guidance office, the school district office, or the state Department of Labor website.
- **Step 2:** The employer (the golf club or caddy master) completes their section confirming the job, hours, and working conditions.
- **Step 3:** A parent or guardian signs the application.
- **Step 4:** The school principal or issuing authority approves and issues the permit.
- **Step 5:** The permit is filed with the employer and a copy kept by the student.

Work permits are typically renewed each year and may become void if a student changes schools or employers. Some states issue permits tied to a specific employer — if you change clubs, a new permit may be required.

Private Club Caddy Programs and Minor Employment

Many private golf clubs with established caddy programs are experienced in hiring junior caddies and are well-versed in minor employment requirements. When you contact a caddy master about a position, it is completely appropriate to ask: "Do you have junior caddies and do you help with work permit paperwork?" A club that regularly hires junior caddies will have a clear process and will guide you through it.

⚠ Independent Contractor Note

Some clubs handle the employment relationship differently — caddies may be described as "independent contractors" rather than employees. This affects work permit requirements, tax reporting (1099 vs W-2), and certain legal protections. If a club describes caddies as independent contractors, parents should confirm what this means for their child's specific situation and consult their state's labor department if unsure.

State-by-State Variation: The Most Important Thing to Know

Federal law sets the floor. State law often goes further. Here are examples of how states vary — illustrating why you must check your specific state:

Examples of State Variation

- **Minimum age for employment:** Most states allow employment from 14, but rules on caddying specifically may have age rulings in some states.
- **Work permit age threshold:** Some states require permits through age 17; others only through age 15 or 16.
- **Hour restrictions:** Some states are more restrictive than the federal minimums on school-year hours for 14–15 year olds.
- **Parental consent:** Some states require additional consent documentation beyond the standard permit process.
- **Tax reporting:** Even with a work permit, minors earning over a certain threshold may need to file a tax return. Consult a tax professional if earnings become significant.

To find your state's exact rules: search "[Your State] Department of Labor minor employment" or "[Your State] child labor laws." Most state DOL websites have a dedicated youth employment section.

Emotional and Social Readiness

The factor that determines first-season success as much as age or fitness

Physical age and legal eligibility are necessary conditions for caddying, but not sufficient ones. The conversations in Module 3 — reading players, knowing when to speak, handling frustrated golfers, navigating the social dynamics of a private club — require emotional maturity that varies considerably from student to student, regardless of age.

Emotional Readiness Marker	Why It Matters on the Course
Handles feedback without shutting down	Players will correct, direct, and sometimes criticize. A caddy who internalizes criticism instead of processing it professionally will have a difficult first season.
Stays composed under pressure	A frustrated player, a lost ball, a mistake — these happen every round. How your student responds determines everything about their reputation.
Comfortable with adult conversation	Four hours with an adult stranger requires a baseline of social confidence. Students who freeze with adults they don't know will find the communication skills in Module 3 out of reach.
Reliably self-managed	Can they wake up, get ready, arrive on time, and perform consistently without constant parental management? This is the foundational character trait of a good caddy.
Understands consequences of mistakes	A caddy who gives a wrong yardage or places the bag on the green understands that these aren't just errors — they affect another person's experience. Responsibility awareness matters.

A student who is 14 and physically ready but not yet emotionally ready will have a worse first season — and may damage their reputation before it's built — compared to a student who waits until 15 and starts with full maturity. There is no shame in deciding to wait one more season. The course will still be there.

Family Readiness Checklist

Work through every item before applying for a first caddy position

Every item on this checklist should be clearly resolved before the first loop. Work through it together as a family.

- Age confirmation:** Our student is ___ years old. The course's minimum age requirement is ____. We meet this requirement.

- State law research:** We have checked our state's minor employment laws at the state Department of Labor website. The minimum working age in our state for this type of work is ____.

- Work permit status:** Our student [] does / [] does not require a work permit in our state. If required, we have obtained it or know exactly how to obtain it.

- Hour restrictions:** During the school year our student may work ___ hrs/school day and ___ hrs/week. During summer these restrictions [] apply / [] do not apply at age ____.

- Physical readiness:** Our student has completed at least one full 18-hole walk carrying a weighted bag and felt comfortable afterward.

- Program completion:** Our student has completed all modules of the HSGA Junior Caddy Program and holds the Junior Caddy Certificate.

- Logistics confirmed:** We have confirmed transportation to and from the course and a plan for immediate pickup if needed after early loops.

- Target facility identified:** We have identified at least one course with a junior caddy program that accepts our student's age group, and we have made initial contact.

When every item on this checklist is checked, your student is ready to apply.

A Final Word for Parents

The most valuable thing a parent can do before their student's first loop is walk a full 18 holes alongside them — not playing, just walking — to physically experience what carrying a bag for four to five hours actually feels like. Many parents who do this come away with a much clearer, more realistic picture of what the job demands. It also gives you and your student a chance to discuss what they observed, what they would do in specific situations, and whether they feel genuinely ready.

If your child completes this program, passes the readiness checklist, and lands a caddy job at a local club, they will not just be earning money. They will be developing professionalism, communication skills, and work ethic in an environment that most adults never get access to. The relationships they form on the course — with players who respect and appreciate great service — can open doors that no resume alone ever could.

Caddying teaches young people that showing up, working hard, and treating people well is a strategy that works everywhere in life. The preparation you've invested in completing this program is the foundation. The loops will build the rest.