

Hunting with Young Children

Children develop at their own pace, so parents will know when it's right to introduce them to hunting. Start with short walks in nature when they are physically able. Kids under ten typically observe rather than participate in hunting or shooting. Between ages 10 and 13, they may show interest in getting more involved and may start hunting. It can take years of observing before a child is ready to fully participate

Engaging them in outdoor activities should be enjoyable, even if it requires effort from the adult. Proper introductions are crucial for building solid foundations, as negative experiences can have lasting impacts. Developing an interest in outdoor pursuits often begins with non-hunting activities, especially for younger children. Start small by involving your child in planning hunting trips, packing bags, and taking short hikes that gradually increase in length to build endurance. Allow them to carry their own daypack to instill a sense of responsibility. Engage them in scouting to gain firsthand experience in identifying scat, footprints, and bird signs. These ordinary outdoor experiences serve as the foundation for future hunting adventures.

When you and your child are ready for the first upland trip, leave your expectations at home. Hunting with a child can be challenging and is often not traditionally successful. Children are loud, squirmy, and curious, asking many questions. Answer them, even if they're about snacks. This trip is about your child, not you, your dogs, or the birds. Focus on making it their experience and redefine a "successful" hunt as bonding with your child.

To ensure an enjoyable experience, plan ahead. Avoid the hottest or coldest days, dense cover, and heavy snow. Choose a pleasant day. Discuss your hunting plan and how the dogs will work. Remind them of what to do when a bird is spotted or a dog points. Keep the first trip short, simple, and focused on learning rather than limits or holding a gun.

Focus on safety, learning, and fun during outings. Keep children engaged by letting them carry a bird or examine its feathers and crop. Involve them in caring for dogs, maintaining equipment, or handling harvested birds when appropriate. Build their confidence and encourage following directions and active listening.

Let Your Child Graduate from One Firearm to The Next

Let younger children start with an unloaded Daisy Red Ryder. Older kids and preteens can handle a .22 LR or single-shot shotgun. Gradually moving to youth-friendly guns helps increase their experience.

When ready to carry their own shotgun, practice with low recoil shells and make it fun by using melons as targets instead of cans. This also teaches environmental responsibility.

Once they can handle their gun well, introduce clay targets. When they break clays and control the muzzle, they are ready for upland hunting.

The Importance of Safety and Hunter Education

Always prioritize safety before letting a child into the field, regardless of age or ability. Reinforce safety every time you take them outdoors. Hunters' safety and education are lifelong skills that should be consistently practiced. As a role model, know all the rules and precautions and demonstrate them correctly, as children will mimic your actions.

Entry level Bird Hunts Kids Will Enjoy

For a child's first upland hunt, consider starting with pheasants at a local game preserve. Preserves often provide a more controlled environment, where seeing birds is more likely. Flushes are typically easier to orchestrate, and the grounds offer easy walking. As the adult, focus on safety, watching the dogs, building anticipation, and boosting your child's confidence while they engage in hunting and harvesting.

Your child's size, physical capabilities, and maturity will determine their progress speed. Learn to recognize when they are losing interest, getting fatigued, or uncomfortable. Let them set the pace and involve themselves as much or as little as they prefer. Success lies in knowing when to stop.

It is important to balance sharing your passion with managing your children's expectations without pressuring them into something they don't enjoy. Avoid focusing too much on details. Children should be allowed to have fun; otherwise, they may not want to participate again. Let them explore, and if they spook a bird or two, it is not a problem—there will be other opportunities. Focus on giving praise.

Investing in Proper Gear and Fun Activities

Buy suitable clothing and youth-specific gear, like a bird vest, for their comfort. Also, stock up on snacks and drinks to make their adventures enjoyable.

Nurturing Positive Outdoor Experiences

If your child decides they are not interested in hunting, it is important to respect their decision and not pressure them. Allow them to experience the outdoors on their own terms. As mentioned earlier, there are many ways for your child to participate, even if they are not directly interested in hunting. Keeping opportunities open for them to enjoy other aspects of the outdoor experience might lead them to consider hunting again later.

It is also acceptable to let them bring items to keep them entertained during downtime or travel to and from the hunting location. While it might be tempting to ban technology on outdoor trips, this could unintentionally create negative feelings towards the activity.

If they do not want to give up their phone, suggest that they be the photographer for the day. If they complain of boredom, offer them a walkie-talkie, let them mark waypoints on your hunt map, or have them manage one of the dogs' handhelds. Hunting with you does not need to start with hunting birds.

From preparing for their first outing to harvesting their first bird and beyond, youth can learn valuable lessons in the field. They will develop respect for the land and the birds that inhabit it. They will appreciate the hardworking dogs they follow, and the knowledge gained from being outdoors will sharpen their instincts and resourcefulness. They can learn patience, diligence, and discipline, which are attributes that build self-confidence. These lessons can last a lifetime.

This guidance aims to nurture your child's curiosity, instill a desire for conservation, and foster a respect and appreciation for game birds.

While you may be responsible for scheduling and planning, your child will determine the pace at which they learn. **Enjoy the process—it is an enriching experience.**