

# TAKING KIDS FISHING

A fishing trip is much more than just going to catch fish. The excitement of getting the boat ready, packing a lunch, going over the checklist, picking out lures for the tackle box, buying worms, etc., is all part of the fun. The fishing experience teaches a child about patience, makes them aware of the sights and sounds of the outdoors, and provides a great sense of accomplishment from baiting a hook to catching that first fish. We all need to take the time to bring our children outside and teach them about taking ownership in caring for the natural environment. Help our Illinois youth get excited about fishing—if you can pass on your knowledge, you will be continuing a great tradition of exploring Illinois lakes and rivers.

**Here are some ways to teach young people of all ages to fish and have a successful fishing experience:**

## **Fishing License**

Anyone under the age of 16 in Illinois does not need a license to fish. However, the adult with them will need a license. Just a reminder: the fee for your license is used to provide the funds to conserve fisheries and fish populations, as well as the habitats in which they live.

## **Safety**

Many fishing related accidents can be avoided with some forethought. Act on the side of caution, watch over children diligently, and teach by example.

- Young children should always fish with an adult.
- When in a boat or canoe, ALWAYS wear a life jacket.
- If weather turns stormy, be cautious and seek shelter or end your trip early. If you hear thunder, it is time to get off the water!
- Protect young eyes and skin on sunny days. The sun reflects off the water surface, and it can be easy to get a sunburn or damage eyes. Always have young anglers wear a hat, sunscreen, and sunglasses.
- Those hooks are sharp! Teach children to always be aware of where their hook is and not to let it get near anyone else. Set good rules about looking around before anyone casts.
- It is a smart practice to use barbless hooks or pinch down the barbs on your own hooks.
- Be very careful of Poison Ivy. This often grows along disturbed areas around boat ramps or in the woods. If you go on a hike, stay on the trail.

## **Conservation**

Our lakes and rivers belong to everyone and we all must do our part to preserve them for future generations.

- Children and adult alike should keep only what you will eat and never wastefully discard any fish. It is everyone's responsibility to protect the outdoors. Do not throw gum

wrappers, sandwich wrappers, soda cans, bait containers or any other trash in the water. Pack your trash out or dispose of it in a park garbage can.

- Teach kids that fishhooks and line can snag and kill fish, birds, turtles, small mammals and frogs when thrown into the water. These should be discarded in appropriate trash containers.
- Knowing the size and number of fish it is legal to keep is important for all. Talking about regulations with your child provides a great opportunity to discuss why these are necessary and how they can help keep fish populations healthy.

## Where To Go?

Morning trips are best as the fish usually bite better and it is not too hot. A good place to teach a beginner is from a dock. This provides enough room to show kids how to put their worm on a hook, teach them proper casting, and observe other anglers. Sunfish often hang out around docks, making this a great way to view swimming fish and observe how fish are attracted to a lure.

## Child-Sized Equipment



Small hands can handle a kid-sized rod and reel much easier. A beginner fishing rod and reel combination can be found in the sporting good area of most department stores at a low price.

- For kids, the most fun and least amount of line tangles are with spincast tackle.

## The Best Bait

Getting kids excited about fishing usually means actually catching a fish. Fortunately, most kids are happy with any size and kind of catch.

- The best luck will usually be with earthworms. Many a fishing adventure begins with digging for your own worms in the garden or collecting them after a good rain, however, a container of worms are easily purchased from the local tackle shop or marina.
- If the sunfish are really biting, you can use corn, pieces of a hot dog or even marshmallows.

## I caught a fish! Now what?

In the excitement of catching a fish, here are some basic guidelines for the young angler:

- Landing a fish can take some practice. Teach the skill of “setting the hook” with one sharp pull up on the rod to force the hook into the fish’s mouth.
- Teach kids to keep the line tight and the rod tip up and don’t reel in the fish too quickly.

- It is tough for beginner anglers to know how to take a fish off the hook. Encourage kids to closely observe and help out until they feel they are ready to handle a fish and not get poked by spines.
- Before handling a fish, teach the importance of getting your hands wet. This prevents rubbing off the protective slime coating that fish have to prevent infection.
- What kind of fish is it? Point out colors, how to count spines, basic shapes, and other features that can teach kids about the differences of fish species.
- Because most fish have sharp spines that can poke your hand, always handle the fish carefully but firmly.
- If the hook is in too deep, it is best to cut the line about an inch from the fish's mouth and let the fish go. Explain that many times the fish will get rid of the hook on its own and it is best to leave it in rather than cause internal damage trying to get it out.
- If you plan to release the fish, be sure to return it to the water as quickly as possible.
- Take a picture! Have your camera ready so you can show your friends and family the proud moment!

## **Keep the Whine Monster Away**

Fishing can be an exciting activity when there is a fish on the line, but in between those moments, it is necessary to patiently sit quietly, which can be tough for a child for long periods of time. Here are some tips for keeping kids happily fishing.

- Make sure to bring plenty of water.
- Take note of where the restrooms are located.
- Pack a good lunch and plenty of snacks. Maybe you and your little partner can have a special fishing trip snack to enjoy at the end of successful day.
- If your young one is getting antsy, plan to take breaks for a nature walk.
- Point out other wildlife, like birds and turtle. Binoculars are a great item to have along for looking at birds when kids need a change of pace.
- To begin, take lots of shorter trips rather than a full day.
- A great day of fishing doesn't always mean catching fish, so at the end of your trip, review the great sights, sounds, and fun you had.

## **Keep an Angler Diary**

Want to begin a great tradition? Start an angler diary with your child. Each time you go fishing, keep track of your catch, record conditions and what lures were successful, and take notes about the trip. Angler diaries are a great way to keep learning how to become a better angler: what fish were biting during the spring? What lures worked best on cloudy days? Did fishing early in the morning at your favorite lake make a difference? It is also a wonderful way to remember those special stories.

# The Fishing Trip Checklist

Cooler + Ice  
Water Bottles  
Drinks  
Lunch / Snacks  
Camera (and a waterproof bag)  
Rain jackets  
Sunglasses (Polaroid)  
Hat  
Sunscreen  
Insect repellent  
First Aid Kit

Fishing License (for anyone over 16 years old)  
Rod  
Reel (with line)  
Tackle Box (hooks, bobbers, lures)  
Bait (worms, grasshoppers, crickets, etc.)  
Stringer  
Longnose Pliers  
Life Jackets



Wear comfortable clothes that will dry fast!