

News from the watershed

Jennifer Abbey

Family Fishing

One of my favorite childhood memories is going fishing with my dad. Statistics show that most lifelong anglers are first introduced to fishing by a mentor, usually a family member. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) have some tips for introducing a family member (young or old!) to the sport of fishing.

First, be patient! This is probably the most important suggestion. The goal of fishing (superseding even the actual catching of fish) is to have an enjoyable time. Tangles, snags, and lost fish are almost inevitable so take them in stride. Avoid negative criticism, don't raise your voice, and concentrate on covering a few basics while having a good time.

Keeping it simple will make the first fishing trip for anyone more enjoyable. Avoid a long list of "do's and don'ts." Once you have already covered the basics (casting, waiting for a bite, and reeling in) don't try to correct every mistake (the line is a bit too slack or the rod tip held a bit too low). A good rule of thumb is unless it's something that will really prevent them from being able to catch a fish that day, don't mention it. Some concepts you may be able to teach before the actual first trip. For example, knot tying and casting techniques can be done in the backyard. New anglers should also be introduced to simple equipment. Beginners will do much better with a spincast or spinning rod and reel than with a baitcaster. Also, start off with live bait instead of lures and use a bobber to help detect fish strikes.

If you're freshwater fishing, it might be better to seek the commoner and easier to catch sunfish instead of going after the glamorous but sometimes elusive bass. Using worms or hotdogs as live bait will attract sunfish and catfish, and even any bass that happen to be nearby. While waiting for a bite you might point out the other pleasures to be had from this sport: the fresh air, the great outdoors, interesting wildlife, and good company.

Do as much as you can to make your student comfortable on that first trip. Remember the raincoats in case it sprinkles, bring snacks or a bagged lunch, and don't forget a hat, sunscreen, and bug spray!

Young beginners in particular are very impressionable, and fishing provides an ideal opportunity to teach responsibility and to reinforce the importance of good choices. Don't introduce too many rules at once, but do take the time to properly identify and measure fish and to address size and bag limits (and discuss the reasons behind them). The first fishing trip is also the time to begin instilling a respect for fellow creatures, whether released or kept for the frying pan, and the environment we share with them. Fishing is a sport in which very often no one else is watching, and behaviors learned here can have incredibly far-reaching implications for other aspects of life.

For more information about Florida fishing, boating, licenses and permits, and regulations visit FWC's website: www.floridaconservation.org/

Jennifer Abbey is a NRCS Soil Conservationist with the Highlands County Soil and Water Conservation District: www.highlandsswcd.org. She can be reached at 402-6545.