

10 KEYS TO MENTORING A SUCCESSFUL YOUTH TURKEY HUNT

It has been my privilege to have mentored over a dozen youth (first time hunters) in the past 20 years and it never gets old. I found that if you have a passion for something as I do for hunting it can be contagious.

Having said that, in this ever increasing and speedy world we live in youth are moving at a much faster pace and as a result of being exposed to a million things a minute schools have seen an increase in students labeled (I hate that word) ADD (attention deficient disorder). They can't seem to stay focus on any one thing for too long.

After retiring from the Army in 1988 I spent the next twenty years teaching as both a Para-educator and substitute teacher in the public education system and I've learned a few things along the way that I have since applied to mentoring youth in the field.

Key #1 Take the time to go over safety and pattern the gun.

When we decide to mentor we take on an awesome responsibility to get our young hunters started in the right direction. I always like to get with my youth a few days in advance and cover the firearm he'll be using, where the safety is located, where and how to aim, target identification, etc. I let him/her shoot at a turkey target to get use to the discharge and to make sure that they are able to hit what they're aiming at. By following these steps I have yet to have a youth miss a turkey. Note: Not all youth are ready to start hunting at the same ages and after this phase you may discover they aren't ready i.e. they're afraid of the gun so much so they can't hit a target etc . If that happens, let it go there is no rush and there is always next season.

Key #2 Use a youth size lightest gauge and lightest load possible.

This year for the first time you can shoot a turkey with a .410 which has a much lighter kick than a 20 gauge. This will help get more youth involved at an earlier age but will probably take more practice at hitting the target at a closer range. Remember we're teaching and it is the responsibility of every hunter regardless of their age to know their limitations.

Key #3 Prepare as much as you can in advance.

Mentors do a lot of work. We get out way in advance and scout so that we know in advance where the turkey signs are and where the birds are roosting, strutting, dusting or feeding. It will be very encouraging and educational for a youth if he/she goes with you and actually sees signs that you know are there; and you don't have to tell them that you've worked your butt off way before hand to be sure he/she saw signs (laughing). We plan for success.

Key #4 Use a blind.

When hunting with a youth you have to have a blind (it's an absolute) they can't sit still for long periods. That is something that comes with time and maturity but your blind doesn't have to be an expensive blind (see: <http://www.huntfortriley.com/burlapblind.pdf>) you can even build a natural blind (<http://www.instructables.com/id/Building-A-Natural-Ground-Blind/>) The important thing is to get your blind set up before the day of the hunt. That saves you from having to take extra equipment in the dark and avoids having to set it up in the dark. Less noise, less light, equals more success.

Key #5 Use decoys.

I am not going to get into the use of decoys i.e. how many to use, how to set them up, etc. Every experienced turkey hunter I know has his/her own methods that have proven over the years to have been successful for him/her. But no matter how you set them up do let your youth help you. Kids love helping and they love lots of honest phrase.

Key #6 Use at least one box call.

It's the easiest call to master and the easiest to teach. Show your youth how to use it and let him/her hit a few notes on it. They'll like that believe me.

Key #7 Keep your outings short (no more than a half a day).

I recommend a half a day especially if the action has been slow but I have hunted with youth who wanted to go all day and were enthusiastic about it. Use your own judgment but if you see them nodding off or getting bored it's probably time to pack it in. Remember we want the experience to be a good one so that they'll be encouraged to go again. The number one mistake that adults make with kids is staying out so long that it's no longer fun for the youth.

Key #8 Bring a distraction.

Let the youth bring his/her i-pad, kindle etc. Just make sure they bring ear phones along with them this will give them a distraction while waiting and make the time not seem as long. Heck when I'm hunting in a blind by myself I'll often bring a book to read. It keeps me from calling too frequently and helps out wait those old birds hanging out just out of range. In turkey hunting he who waits longest wins (laughing).

Key #9 Never pressure a shot.

If the opportunity presents itself never pressure a youth to make a shot. The shooter and only the shooter knows when he/she feels comfortable with pulling the trigger. On my grandson's first hunt he passed up a huge gobbler I would have taken. When I asked him about it later he said, "I just didn't feel like I could make a clean kill." That was one of the proudest moments of my life and I knew that he would never accidentally shoot another hunter with an attitude like that.

Key #10 Have fun you have made a positive impression.

Above all have a good time. Have fun it's not always about the harvest but the companionship. You've taken time out of your schedule to introduce a new hunter to your sport. Kids know that and they appreciate it. You've made a positive impression. Never be critical but do give honest phrase every chance you get and you'll be a mentor that parents request over and over again. Most important the kids will talk about you and your hunt for a long time after the season ends.