

# TIPS

F O R

# MENTORS & PARENTS

by David Stainbrook, Deer & Moose Project Leader

**T**oday's youth are balancing many different competing activities that many of us did not have at their age. This does not mean we should force them to sit still in the woods for hours like many of us did on our first hunt. They are going to fidget, have a limited attention span, get bored quickly, ask questions, and make mistakes. Make sure their first hunting experience is a good one. If they do not have fun, they are not

likely to want to do it again. Remember, the Youth Deer Hunt Day is not the only day that they can hunt. Youth can go out with you throughout the entire season. The Youth Deer Hunt Day simply provides them an opportunity to be the only ones out hunting deer and have their own deer tag on that day.

Emphasize safety by setting a good example. This should be your number



Photo © Brian Dias

*Audra Saucier, 13, proudly poses with the six point, 170 pound buck she harvested with a .410 shotgun in Achusnet during MassWildlife's 2015 Youth Deer Hunt Day. Her father Mark served as her mentor. In her story contest submission, Audra wrote, "My experience was so thrilling and terrific. This was the first year I ever shot a deer and I had the best time of my life."*

one priority. Handle the firearm in a safe manner and explain to always know what is behind your target. Be sure to have at least 500 square inches of blaze orange (blaze orange hat and a vest/jacket). If you are inside a ground blind or enclosed tree stand, make sure that orange is visible from every direction.

Remember not to have unrealistic expectations and goals. Not everyone will get a deer. That does not mean the hunt was a failure. There are many ways to measure the success of a hunt. Make sure the youth knows this. They are looking to you to gauge whether the hunt was a good time or not. Here are few tips to help make a young hunter's first experience an enjoyable one:

## Prior to the hunt

Have them practice with the right equipment (e.g., 20 gauge youth shotgun) at a shooting range. Forcing them to shoot a shotgun with a lot of kickback may cause them to flinch when they pull the trigger and make the experience not enjoyable.

Include them in all of the preparation work, such as gaining landowner permission, scouting, and setting up the tree stand. Have them help to pack their bag.

## The day of the hunt

Make sure they have appropriate and comfortable clothing. Boots, thick socks, raingear, gloves, etc. Bring along spare clothes, socks, and boots. Hand warmers are great to have, even if you think it is warm, kids get cold.

If they will be sitting, make sure that they are comfortable by bringing a pad to sit on.

Get a good, solid, healthy breakfast and take along plenty of snacks and drinks, but never leave behind your trash in the woods.

Try mixing up the day—plan a brief hunt early and late in the day and mix up sitting with some walking. Take breaks, use the middle of day to scout a new area, go out for lunch, etc. The part of the hunt they may remember forever might very well be the time they spent with you.

Make it fun! See through the eyes of a child. Bring binoculars to see all of the wildlife in the forest. Squirrels scurrying around can either be viewed with wonder or seen as annoying, it is up to you. Bring a book to identify trees and plants. Look at the life hidden under rocks and decomposing logs. Use the day as a learning experience. Relish the sun coming up and the sounds of the forest. If you need to bring along something to keep them entertained when things are slow (books or electronics on mute), that is okay.

If you are lucky enough to have a deer within range, do not pressure them to take a shot when they are not ready. Remember, it all happens so fast and they have a lot of things on their mind. Let them decide when they are ready. It is okay if they pass on a shot that you would have taken.



*Mitchell Barnes, 17  
Cheshire, MA*



Photo © Mitchell Barnes

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