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TAKING KIDS FRESHWATER FISHING – WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

So you are going to take some kids fishing! Maybe they are yours, or those of a relative or friend. Either as an angler or interested adult, you want these kids to have fun. Here are some common sense steps to follow:

- Remember to make it a kid's adventure.

Consider whether you should concentrate only on fishing or whether it should be a more general outdoor aquatic experience— you might decide this based on the children's age. Depending upon their age, allow time and give permission for wading in the water, skipping stones, catching frogs, floating sticks and leaves, playing ball, playing hide and seek, collecting wild flowers, or finding insects. Make it a fun adventure so they will want to go "fishing" again. If you wish, allow them to bring friends, but limit the friends and their number. Too many children on a fishing trip are difficult to control. Leave pets at home.

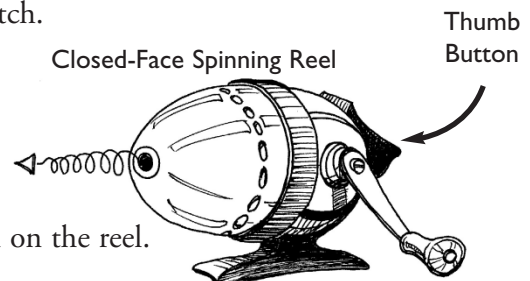
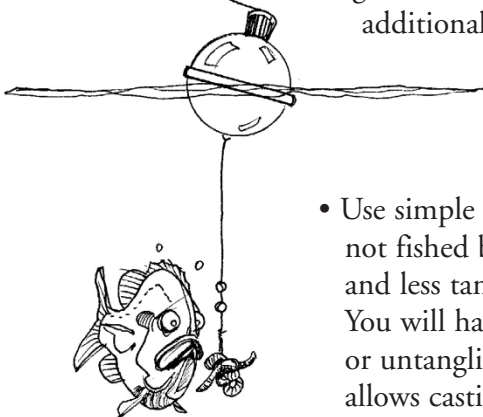
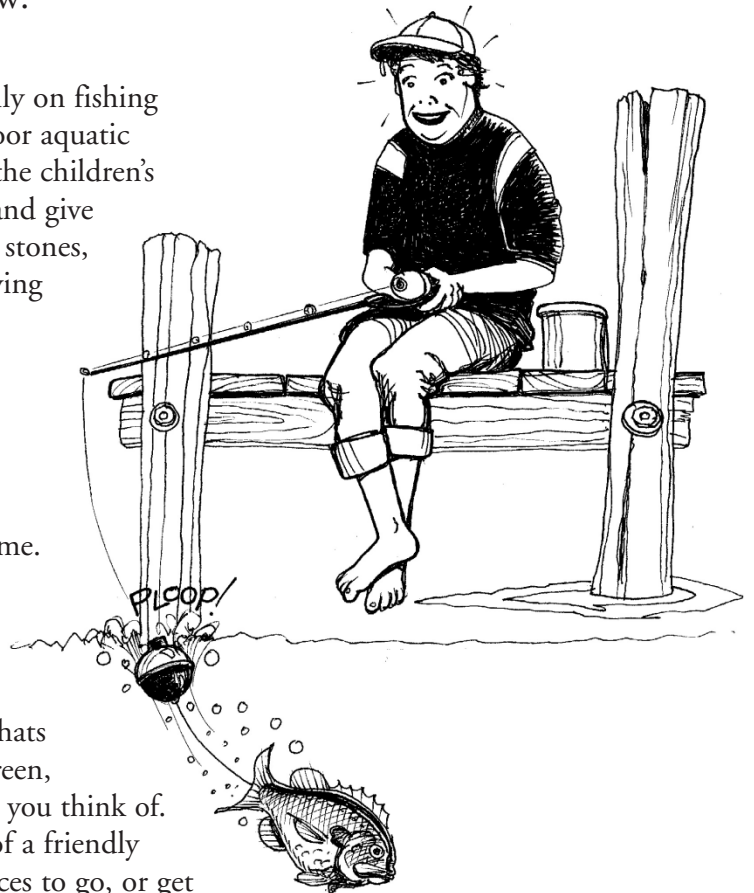
- If you fish, review basic skills to be prepared.

Check your tackle. Don't take along expensive tackle or heirlooms that you do not want damaged. Be prepared for your new fishing buddies by bringing along extra hats and caps, extra clothing if it gets cool, sunscreen, sunglasses, snacks, drinks, and anything else you think of.

- If you do not fish, check with the staff of a friendly tackle shop for some tips, tricks and places to go, or get started at **TakeMeFishing.org**. This site will provide places to fish and boat, community fishing events and local resources. Check with your state Fish and Game Agency for additional ideas and events.

- When you fish, make sure that you have the proper license, and that you are fishing legally. If you are going to eat your catch, make sure that you are fishing in season and abide by the size and number limits for the species you catch.

- Use simple tackle. Children who have not fished before will have the most fun and less tangles with spincast tackle. You will have the least problems in fixing or untangling their gear. Spincast tackle allows casting by releasing a thumb button on the reel.



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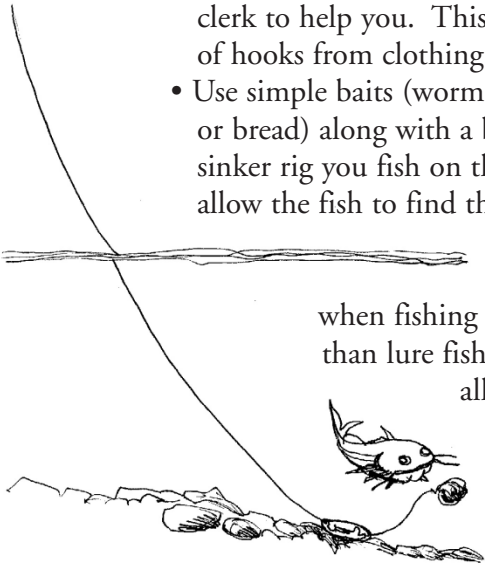
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- Make sure that you are extremely careful with hooks. Use hooks only when fishing. For safety, buy barbless hooks. Otherwise, use needle nose pliers to bend down the barbs on all hooks used, or ask a tackle shop clerk to help you. This allows easy removal of hooks from clothing and people.



Barbless Hook

- Use simple baits (worm, grasshoppers, cricket or bread) along with a bobber (float) or sinker rig you fish on the bottom. These allow the fish to find the bait, rather than



the repeated casting required when fishing with lures. It is easier than lure fishing, fun and also allows kids to have fun doing other things while waiting for bites.

- Fish for plentiful and easily caught fish such as panfish, sunfish, crappie, carp, etc, rather than fishing for trout, bass or walleye. Often, there are liberal size and catch limits for these popular and plentiful species, should you or the children want to eat some fish.
- Only keep fish that are legal. Only keep fish that you plan to eat. Introduce children to the "catch-and-release" concept of allowing fish to live for future fishing fun.
- Make the trip short. It is better to leave a little early – or when the kids want to leave – so that they remember it as a happy time. Don't have a prescribed time frame during which you must stay and fish. It is better for children to leave wishing they could stay a little longer than for them to wish they had left sooner.
- Limit practice with tackle. Don't require that the children be expert casters or experienced fishermen. If they want to learn casting,

spend a little time (fifteen minutes per day, maximum) with it a few days before the fishing adventure. Make sure that you do not use hooks during these practice sessions. (Use a small piece of wood about 1/4 ounce weight with a screw eye in the end or a purchased "practice plug".) Allow children to set the schedule and time for casting practice to make it enjoyable. Similarly, don't make knot tying a requirement for their going fishing.

- Be prepared to tie the knots, rig the gear and bait the hooks – even make the casts – once you are on the water. Be prepared to take the fish off of the hook when they do land one. If the kids want to participate, let them. Be sure to let them reel in the fish – that's the fun part. It is a good learning experience and confidence builder for them. Don't be critical of their casting skill, knot tying ability or reluctance to handle bait or fish.
- If the children are likely to wade or play in the water, consider requiring a life preserver (PFD or Personal Flotation Device) for each child. If you are fishing from a boat, you must have a PFD for each person on board.
- Make it a picnic. Bring food, snacks and drinks so that between bites, skipping stones and catching frogs, you can all enjoy an outdoor meal. Avoid cooking, since cooking and fishing will split your time and attention too much.
- Conversation during meal time is also a great opportunity to instill responsibility by pointing out to them the importance of picking up trash, not littering, and teaching them that discarded fish hooks and line does harm wildlife. Trash makes for an ugly place to fish, while discarded line can snag and kill fish, birds, turtles, small mammals and frogs. Take all your trash out with you, or discard in appropriate trash containers.

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- Have fun. Part of being a parent, step-parent, guardian or friend to children is to enjoy each event on their level. The number of fish caught, the species of fish or the size of fish is not important. It is important for children to enjoy the outdoors and fishing. Make this trip one of many such bonding experiences. You can introduce kids to nature, the value of

the environment, the importance of fish and game laws and the biology and habitat of fish. The "fun" part is most important, so that they will want to go fishing again. Such trips will help cement relationships and help children learn about a sport that they can enjoy their entire lives.

HERE'S A CHECK LIST TO HELP YOU GET READY FOR YOUR FISHING TRIP:

1. Wear comfortable, appropriate clothing.
2. Bring sunglasses, sun screen and hats for sun protection.
3. Bring insect repellent and insect bite salve.
4. Include a small first aid kit
5. Bring enough appropriate tackle for each person fishing
6. If you plan to eat your catch, bring a cooler or stringer
7. Include bait that is easy to get and use – worms, grasshoppers, crickets, grubs, caterpillars
8. Include "picnic" food that is fun, such as snacks, fruit, sandwiches, and fruit drinks or water.
9. If possible, fish near home so that the trip does not exhaust everyone before the fishing fun.
10. Bring and wear life preservers (PFD's) if necessary (as when fishing from a boat) as well as for small children or those wading or swimming.
11. Do not take too many children at any one time and make sure that a responsible adult is always watching the children.

