

## Youth Hunter Seminar Guidelines

Youth involvement in The Hunting Retriever Club, Inc. is critical to keep our program going in the future. The Youth Hunter Program is geared towards teaching kids how to run a hunt test, not how to train dogs. (Although this is an integral part of the seminar) It is to entice them to want to run tests and further their involvement in HRC.

Below is an outline of organizing and teaching a youth seminar. Every thing is taught in individual sessions. Keep in mind ages and skill levels of those attending and adjust how curriculum is presented to meet the needs of the participants.

- A. Location: A camp facility is ideal, however not all regions may have access to this kind of place. Enough space is needed for marks to be thrown as a double. It can be done on land or a nice body of water. Most everything else can be done inside this space. \*Make certain there are allowances in an area for dogs to be off lead, and for guns to be fired.
- B. Dates: Picking a date and giving enough notice is important to putting on a successful camp. Having it at a time when kids are out of school is also something to consider. Advertise through your Public Relations Rep and in the HR Magazine, as well as through regional club presidents and word of mouth.
- C. Cost: This is relative to the facility used. The camp sight may not cost anything if someone donates the sight. Food costs can be kept to a minimum if offering a day camp. For instance, have campers bring a sack lunch. Ask club members to volunteer to bring a grill and cook hotdogs or burgers. You can rent a facility and charge each participant for lodging and meals. It must be affordable, else not many will come.
- D. Ages: Kids from the age of 8 to 18 are allowed to participate. It has been determined, that children younger than 8 years of age do not have the motor skills nor concentration levels to participate fully. However, age should not be a limiting factor. \*You may decide to allow a younger child to come – just make sure he/she is capable and that it does not hinder the progress of the majority of the group. If we do not seize the opportunity to get children involved, they soon will be into other activities such as: sports, cheerleading, cars, etc.. Then we've lost them forever. Kids are the future of HRC!!!
- E. Parent or guardian supervision: Is required. Any child participating must have a parent or guardian on sight the entire time just in case of an emergency. Keep in mind you will have their dogs, and their children will be handling real guns. Any adult coming will be subject to a background check. Check with your state to locate the website for completing this safeguard.
- F. Deadline to register: This is a must. Stick to your date so that you will have a planning window.
- G. Seminar leader and committee: You will need 1) a chairman to oversee the event, 2) someone in charge of equipment, 3) a camp monitor (if staying over night) to assign rooms, be there in case of emergency, 4) someone in charge of underwriting ( getting sponsors, donations, etc), and 5, 6, 7)...session leaders (ideally these people would be professional trainers or amateurs that are very experienced not only with dogs, but work well with kids of all ages.) *All these people should donate their time!*
- H. Equipment: launchers are great, but hand thrown marks are perfectly fine as long as throwers are consistent. If working with a limited group, electronics to launch are a must. Holding blinds need to be used to conceal the throwers and for the campers to have a place to hold the dog before coming to the line, a gun stand, youth model gun (shorter/lighter) primer poppers, bumpers or dead fowl trainers are best. If the weather is warm, real birds will begin to decay and most kids will not be so eager to touch them.

Plenty of orange bumpers for blind retrieves are needed. Bucket to sit on, bucket to place bumpers in once retrieve is made. \*Keep in mind – if the marking session is taught before gun safety – do not use a real gun on the line or have no gun at all.

- I. Groups: Have enough experienced leaders so that groups are small to allow plenty of individual attention. Dividing the children into groups should be done randomly, not by ability or age. This will keep younger children looking up to older more experienced ones. No one will feel less important by being in the young or “b” group. Children are amazing in the fact that they will learn quicker and get up to speed because of group peer pressure. However, flexibility during sessions is a must. For instance, if a child is struggling in a particular session, one must adjust the way it is presented. Not all children learn the same way. Have an experienced person outside the group that might take that child aside and help him/her understand and gain confidence in the task.
- J. Sessions: Should include but not be limited to the following topics. Each session should last no more than 45 minutes. Keep in mind how long a young person can stay focused, as well as a dog. Allow for repeats if there happens to be a problem. If a session takes longer, be sure to take a break and allow the children and dogs a water/ bathroom break:

1. Obedience

- a. This topic as the first session helps kids get comfortable with the dog he/she is handling, as well as the group leader. To introduce the session, explain equipment use and commands. Keep talking to a minimum, because kids want to work – not talk! You can add little bits of information as the session goes. Incorporate things like dog stands, platforms, holding blinds, mutt huts, mojo ducks, etc.. to give added dimension and challenge to the session. Obedience can be very boring, but giving the team something to navigate is engaging. They are learning and not even realizing it.

2. Marking

- a. This session will take more space and time, so plan ahead. It can be done all together or by being split into groups. If dividing into groups, it will take much more equipment, space, and manpower, so it might be a good idea to do this session as one big group. Have plenty of help for setup. Using multiple wingers to reduce loading time or have someone behind the holding blind at all times to hand-throw marks. You can even teach the campers how to load the wingers (be safe) or how to throw a bumper to help a dog be successful. Depending on the skill level, these can be thrown as singles or doubles. (If a decoy session has already been taught, the kids can learn how to effectively incorporate a spread into the marking setup. This will teach how to get ducks in, as well as how it affects a dog’s behavior.) Time should be spent explaining what to do behind the holding blind before coming to the line, what to do on the line, how to keep a dog under control, etc... as well as picking up the marks successfully. Dogs may or may not be steady in this session. Teach the camper how to deal with holding a started dog versus keeping a seasoned level dog steady on the line.

3. Blind Drills

- a. Handling sessions should be kept very simple, such as a baseball drill to teach kids how to make correct casts and to blow a whistle effectively. Keep groups far apart so that dogs are not influenced by whistles from a nearby group. In this session it is important to have a dog that will be biddable to take solid casts, and react quickly to whistle commands. If the camper does not have a dog trained to this level, provide one that will help build confidence.

#### 4. Gun Safety

a. Being safe with a gun is the most important session of camp. Having an instructor that is informative, yet interesting is essential. Once the key factors have been taught, allowing the children to handle the gun (with supervision) will help them gain confidence and ability. Knowing the basic parts, loading and unloading a shell, firing from a safe position, and placing the gun safely in a stand should be done multiple times.

**\*\*Additional activities** might be: dog games such as: dog musical chairs, egg on a spoon race, super singles, bumper toss, pin the part on the dog, etc... More fun sessions could be duck calling, duck identification, decoy spreads, dog first aid, making a lanyard or lead. Save time for questions and answers. Be creative. You are limited only to your imagination and time as far as topics are concerned. Free time is also very important so that kids can interact with each other and their parent/guardian. Once you put this camp on for several years, you will see what works and what does not. Something that is effective in one region might be a flop in another.

\*Some of the things that have been successful at the camps in Texas are listed below. These can be adjusted to fit the number of volunteers, weather conditions, sight restrictions, and ages of children. It is up to you to be resourceful and to challenge the participants. First and foremost, it must be safe, but fun and challenging.

We are very fortunate to have the use of the Texas 4-H Center facility. It has dorms capable of housing 230 people, with full cafeteria, indoor game room, conference rooms, outdoor pool, basketball court, sand volleyball, horseshoe pit, lake canoeing, archery and shooting courses, etc.... This is a dream location, but getting them to allow dogs on sight was quite a task. We convinced them we would not have dogs inside any part of the center. Also all dog waste was to be picked up by campers (not parents) and disposed of properly. Dogs were allowed to be crated on a covered patio with big fans during the night and during sessions without dogs. Dogs were quite comfortable on the patio.

Campers and parents are notified ahead of time the list of things to bring and not to bring. Equipment needed for the sessions are: a six foot leash, pinch or choke collar, whistle-on-lanyard. E-collars, heeling sticks, slip leads are discussed and allowed if used properly. Remind campers to wear appropriate shoes. Nothing is more painful than having a dog *peel out* on uncovered toes. Flip/flops are not good for dog handling! Each family is to bring their own drinks and snacks. That cuts down on the total cost of the fees charged to each camper. Or you might have a sponsor that would want to donate snacks and drinks.

Appoint a camp photographer and videographer. It's very important to document your sessions. Plus if you have sponsors, they like to see a photo of the kids/dogs/and whatever they donated. Good advertising!

Camp should culminate with a mock hunt test, so that the participants can demonstrate what they learned. On the last morning, have all the campers dress in the t-shirts provided by a donor, and get a group photo before anyone gets "dirty"! Set up a simple seasoned level test – with a double and a blind.

Ask HRC judges to evaluate each run, score on a judge's sheet, then give a positive critic. Teachers of the groups will stand at the line with each child and provide assistance and reassurance as needed. In the past four years, each camper has been amazingly confident and

adept. A large percentage of the kids can run the test without assistance. For an added bonus, each orange bumper has a number written on it, so that once the blind has been retrieved, there is an award waiting corresponding to that number. Or money (dollar bills, \$5, \$10's) can be taped to the bumper if not using water. This gives incentive to pick up the blind! And of course, the gallery should clap wildly in support after each run!

Everything about a seminar should be as positive as possible. Working with young people is tricky. The most important thing is that a child does not get embarrassed – else he/she will quit. Some children are bolder than others. Find a way to entice a shy child to move forward. Keep bold children busy so they don't have a tendency to bully. Having a dog at the end of a lead gives a child power. It helps the bashfulness vanish because the mind is focused on controlling the dog.

During sessions, keep parental involvement to a minimum. Help parents keep quiet and allow the child to make a mistake and learn from it. It may be necessary to give a domineering parent a job away from the session to allow the child to progress.

Make certain dogs are safe for the event. No aggressive dogs should be allowed. Kids forget and allow dogs to get close – make sure a fight does not break out. Remind them about safety first!. Also having a dog capable of running the drills and the test is very important. Encourage campers to bring his/her own dog if they have one, but if that dog is not trained to the level of the session, offer one the child can use at that particular time for there to be success. A grin on a child's face is worth millions!

Please free to contact me with any questions you might have about putting on your own Youth Hunter Camp. I will be most happy to help in any way I can. There is money set aside by HRC for me to travel and help with your camp if scheduling allows. Also, contact me for National Sponsor items. ~~ If one child learns something at the seminar, it was worth every minute spent!

Glenda Mitchell, Chairman  
HRC Youth Hunter Program  
1901 Early Blvd.  
Brownwood, TX 76802  
Ph: 325-646-2252  
[GandGmitch@aol.com](mailto:GandGmitch@aol.com)