“Teaching a young person to hunt safely and ethically provides many rewards for the adult hunter and can create life-long bonds.”

Each year, the number of kids introduced to hunting declines while the hunting population ages. If we are to reverse this trend and ensure the future of hunting, we must make opportunities to take kids hunting.

A Hunter Education class is a great way to introduce youngsters to the basics of hunting and firearms through classroom instruction. The AGFC offers free Hunter Education courses throughout the state and online. Parents are welcome to attend the classes with their children and show them that everyone can benefit from increased safety in the woods. Call 1-800-482-5795 or log on to www.agfc.com for more information.
Planning your hunt

Kids should be allowed to handle guns under direct, responsible adult supervision. Once safe habits have been developed, it’s time to do some shooting. An opportunity to practice shooting before the first hunting trip is a must.

When planning your hunt, accept that you may not do much shooting yourself, if any. Always be willing to come home without any game at all. Your job is to teach, supervise and make sure the kids have an enjoyable and successful hunt. If possible, plan an easy hunt where the game is plentiful.

The ABCs of hunting with kids

The following tips can help you plan a hunting trip with kids that will be rewarding for everyone.

• A lifetime of hunting enjoyment depends heavily on a child’s early experiences. Physical comfort is important. Make sure kids are dressed appropriately for the weather. Pack anything you think you might need, including drinks, snacks, sunscreen and a first-aid kit.

• Become familiar with kids’ knowledge and abilities. Be confident they can and will follow your instructions. Don’t allow children who are too young to follow instruction, handle stressful or dangerous situations, or handle a firearm safely to hunt.

• Half the fun is planning the trip. Build anticipation by allowing kids to help with the planning stages.

• Make sure your children wear appropriate clothing that will alert others of their presence.

• Never “baby-sit” while hunting. Leave kids who are too young or incapable of hunting at home.

• Never leave kids unsupervised in the field while the adults are hunting or scouting.

• Leave your gun at home – plan a trip devoted to the kids. Instead, bring your camera to capture the fun. Remember, there will be only one first hunt.

• Teach kids to always treat guns as though they’re loaded. They should never be allowed to play with them or point them at anyone or anything they don’t intend to shoot.

• Store firearms and ammunition separately, and do not transport loaded firearms.

• Teach kids to be absolutely certain of their target – and what is beyond it. They should not shoot unless they can see their target clearly and are sure of it.

• Let kids know they don’t have to shoot something to be successful. Show them how to observe nature and simply enjoy being outdoors.

• Keep kids’ short attention spans in mind and call it a day before they get bored or tired. If they show signs of becoming hungry, thirsty or cold, it’s time to take a break or head for home.