

It's summer. The kids have been indoors all day playing video games. What do you do?

Get 'em hooked



BY BRANDY CENTOLANZA

IF YOU ARE looking for an outdoor alternative this summer for the family, why not give fishing a try? Hampton Roads is surrounded by water, offering up plenty of opportunities for fishing with the kids.

Fishing “teaches kids patience, to respect the equipment, to respect others around them, and to respect the water,” said Lynn Waldrop, manager for the Buckroe Beach fishing pier in Hampton. “It also gives them something other than a video game to do, and they learn to appreciate the outdoors.”

David Beasley, lead fisheries biologist and regional manager for Solitude Lake Management in Virginia Beach, agrees.

“Fishing gets children involved with nature, and to respect nature,” Beasley said. “When you decide to go fishing, you should try to make it a positive experience, and make it something that your children will enjoy.”

Children as young as toddlers can learn to fish. Beasley was around the age of two when he began.

“Parents need to be involved, but I would say that a child is ready when a kid can hold a fishing pole and function by the water’s edge,” Beasley said.



PHOTO BY HARRY GERWIEN

Truman enjoys an afternoon of fishing at the Ocean View Fishing Pier.

...on fishing.

Before you start, Beasley suggests contacting local bait and tackle shops for a professional opinion on where to take kids fishing. Small ponds and lakes are preferred, or fishing piers.

Children can fish at Buckroe Beach fishing pier on Wednesday and Sunday afternoons, and staff members are there to answer questions and offer tips.

"It's a good way to learn," Waldrop said. "We like to make it exciting for them, and teach them about the different fish that are in the bay. When they catch the fish, we also show them the different parts of the fish. When you see a child who's just caught their very first fish and has this huge smile on their face, you know they are hooked and they want to come back."

Bluegills are the easiest fish to start trying to catch with children because "there are so many of them and they are always active and hungry," said Andy Priestley, owner of Head Hunters Headquarters sporting goods store in Toano. Priestley helps maintain the fishing facilities at Little Creek Reservoir Park in James City County. Fishing lessons are available at the park.

Equipment to bring along includes the rod and reel—Priestley suggests kids start with a spincast rod-plus tackle (hooks and bobbers) and bait.

"There are some safety precautions you want to take," Priestley said. "The first thing that you want to take into account is that these are sharp objects that you are using. You also have to get used to handling the bait, and that's one of the biggest things to get used to because some people don't want to touch slimy worms or minnows."

Artificial bait is available to attract fish as well.

"If taking several kids fishing, it is ideal to use a type of bait that does not come off the hook easily," Beasley said. "This will allow you to avoid putting new bait on frequently. You should plan to spend the entire time assisting them during fishing. If at all possible, I would suggest bringing someone along who knows how to fish and have them fish alongside the kids. As they figure out how and where to catch fish, they can assist the kids and provide them with success."

Children under the age of 16 do not need a fishing license, but their accompanying adults do. It is also a good idea to bring a cooler for any fish you catch, bug spray, sunscreen and a hat, rain gear, water and snacks, lawn chairs if you will be sitting along the water bank, and a camera.

"You should also have a back up plan if it isn't going well," Beasley suggested. "Preparation is everything and remember to keep it simple."

Beasley said to keep the first fishing experience short.

"If the fish are not biting you can improvise and have fun in the outdoors instead," he said. "Don't be afraid to stop fishing and continue with other outdoor activities. Kids playing along the shore and staying active outside is a great way to improvise for a bad fishing outing. Often times, kids can lose interest in fishing even if the fishing is good. Have a few options to keep their attention, even if they do not all relate to fishing. You want it to be a pleasant experience, and something that they will remember as fun."

Get fishing!

Here are some places in Hampton Roads to get you started:

Buckroe Beach Fishing Pier, North First Street, Hampton, 727-1486

Sandy Bottom Nature Park, 1255 Big Bethel Rd., Hampton, 825-4657

James River Bridge Fishing Pier, 618 72nd St., Newport News, 247-0364

Newport News Park, 13564 Jefferson Ave., Newport News, 886-7912

Waller Mill Park, 901 Airport Rd., Williamsburg, 259-3778

Little Creek Reservoir Park, 180 Lakeview Dr., Toano, 566-1702

Ocean View Fishing Pier, 400 W. Ocean View Ave., Norfolk, 583-6000

Lynnhaven Inlet Fishing Pier, 2350 Starfish Rd., Virginia Beach, 481-7071

Virginia Beach Fishing Pier, 1506 Atlantic Avenue, Virginia Beach, 428-2333

Northwest River Park, 1733 Indian Creek Rd., Chesapeake, 421-7151

Great Bridge Lock Park, 100 Lock Rd., Chesapeake, 382-6411