

Kids and Archery Classes

Coaching Archery

A big part of teaching archery is working with kids. Teaching sports skills to children is a different process from teaching the same skills to adults. Adults can learn by transferring information from their left brains to their right. Adults will listen to explanations, read instructional materials, and follow instructions (left brain activities) to learn a skill. Over time, the practice of a skill becomes a sub-conscious (right brain) process. Young children learn by demonstration, imitation, and practice. There is less intellectualization in their learning activities. As they grow, their learning abilities change and become more complex. By adapting the teaching style to match the learner's stage of development, the teaching process improves and the participants are more successful.

Learning Patterns by Age Group

The abilities of kids to learn and implement a physical activity changes with age. Kids under ten years old have limited body awareness. In most cases, they will only understand instructions directed at the positions of their head, hands, and feet. When working with very young children, demonstrate what you want them to do and give them instructions in "head, hands, and feet" language. For example if you want them to line up with the target to their bow hand side, direct them to place their feet on either side of the shooting line and draw a line to the target on which they can place their toes. Even better is to have "foot prints" drawn on the floor for the students to step on to.

Teach bow handling, drawing and releasing to young kids by demonstrating where you want

their head, hands and feet to be at each step. With very young children, a few will "get it" and the majority will not. You can maximize the experience for very young children by keeping them safe and rewarding success. Use long arm guards to protect the young shooters and always shoot at very short distances that insure that the arrow will land in the target backstop. The use of balloons and novelty targets improves the experience for young shooters. There's something about popping a balloon that puts a smile on a kid's face.

Ten to twelve-year olds have increased cognitive ability but will still need more time to master their skills than older kids. Children in this age group will not be very responsive to detailed, wordy explanations. Use demonstrations and modeling to help pre-teen kids gain control of their physical abilities. Don't insist on young students perfecting more complex archery skills at this level, as long as they are not building bad habits that will have to be un-learned later.

Twelve to fourteen-year olds will have much higher abilities to learn more sophisticated body movements. They will be more open to short descriptions and will benefit from plenty of practice. Use archery games to help keep the learning process fun. You can also use some written support materials with this age group. This is an age where self-awareness is coming to the front. Video taping can be introduced at this age as long as the review of the tapes is kept in a positive light. In a class situation, you can ask the class members to describe what things they see that the archer is doing right. Showing videos of top international archers can help young students

model competitive shooting form.

Photos and videos can also be used to demonstrate progress. Keep a photo log of each student. As they progress and improve their shooting form, take the time to show “before and after” photos to the archers. They will soon learn to recognize the achievements they have made as they learn new skills.

Kids fourteen and above have very high potentials for learning physical skills. They also can be easily distracted and bore quickly. Expect a lot from kids of this age. Keep them busy with practice and competition. Use drills and repetitive exercises to build muscle memory. Give assignments that include reading and web searches. Hold competitions often and reward archers both for achievement and improvement. Track their progress with achievement records and reward progress.

To help kids mark their progress, use a student record of achievement card. This card is a pre-printed form with places for the archer’s name and group. Each class session is signed off on the card by the instructor. Stickers can be used to substitute for a signature. When all the class sessions are completed by the student and signed off by the instructor, give each student a certi-



cate of completion.

It is also important to make rewards meaningful. A major goal of youth sports is to build self esteem. The best way to build confidence is to help the kids make real advancement in their accomplishments. There is great

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pride in a skill well done. Find something that each student has done well at each session and praise them for it publicly.

Staffing Requirements

Staffing requirements are also governed by the age of the students. With archers under eight years old, you may need one instructor per active archer; 8-10 year olds may require one instructor for every 2-3 archers; 11-13 year olds can be managed with a 4:1 student-teacher ratio, and 14-year olds and up can be managed with 6-10:1 ratio. When working with any size group, having at least two teachers available allows one instructor to run the group while the other focuses on the needs of individual archers. It is too easy for a single instructor to become focused on one archer's issues and lose track of the activities of the rest of the group. It is also important for the safety of both students and teachers that two adults be present with the children at all times.

Communicating with Kids

Communicating with children can be helped by using a few simple guidelines. Dawn Barnes is the founder of Karate Kids, a youth martial arts school chain in Southern California that serves about 1200 kids per month in four locations. Ms. Barnes created the SAMM approach to communications with the children in her schools. SAMM stands for Speak in the affirmative, Ask questions, Motivate with praise, and Make agreements.

The first step in the SAMM approach is to *Speak* to children in the affirmative. Use positive statements for all instructions. Find ways to communicate without using the word no. When a child is doing something wrong, direct them to the correct activity rather than telling them to stop. There should always be a guided activity going on in the class. Use positive reinforcement to direct the students to participate with the others.

The second step is to *Ask* questions to engage the students in the class. Kids are always being told what to do. In time they learn to tune out adults who are directing them. The process of asking questions helps kids become part of the learning process. Asking questions of each student moves the energy around in the class and keeps the focus on the activity at hand. Ask questions that require a complete answer and not a simple yes or no. For instance, it is better to ask a student, "What are you working on today?" than "Are you having a good time today?" Using questions can also help with discipline as it can change the focus from a class disrupter to kids who are paying attention.

The third step is to *Motivate* with praise. This is a variation of the principle of speaking in the affirmative. Recognize each child every day for some achievement. Have the other kids in the class acknowledge the accomplishments of each archer at least once per class session. Use "points" to praise success. It's not important the points mean anything. Just giving points will be its own motivator. When a child does something right say, "That was great, Johnny, you get a point."

The fourth step is to *Make an Agreement* when disciplining kids. When a child misbehaves, ask them to make an agreement with you that further misbehavior will result in a consequence. By involving the child in the discipline process they learn that the choices they make have consequences. The goal is to discipline, not in a negative way, but in an informative way. Use positive consequences such as "meditation time" rather than time outs. After a few rounds of consequences, the kids will not want to make agreements with you and will start to get with the program.

Set reasonable goals for achievement with each class. Only a very small percentage of the students will have the motor and mental skills needed to achieve a high level of success as a top competitive archer. Do your best to nurture the talented students that you do identify. For the others, archery can be a lifelong recreational activity. Help the kids to have fun and remember that improved self esteem comes from success. When the kids achieve success, they will achieve more.



Van Webster is a NAA Level 3 coach and is Vice President of Pasadena Roving Archers. He is the co-author of the Basic Archery Instruction Program (BAIP), a six week course in archery shooting form, taught as part of the PRA Saturday morning archery classes. PRA serves up to 90 community members a week with free and low cost archery instruction. Van is also coordinator for the Woodley Park Archers grant-funded archery outreach program.