

Are your Kids Bored? Get them Hooked on Fishing!

By Cindy Genau

I love being outdoors, whether it is at the beach or in the woods. At the beach, I enjoy sitting in the sunshine, walking in the sand and swimming in the water. I also love the serenity of sitting by a campfire in the woods where it is quiet enough to enjoy the sounds of nature. This past weekend we did just that with some good friends. We played board games, read books, took a hike, and just talked to each other. I noticed that people were relaxed and had time to say good morning. Young people, older people and families were enjoying nature in the same way. None of the kids who were there seemed bored. They found ways to entertain themselves by riding a bike, collecting sticks for roasting marshmallows, playing catch, and fishing.

I recently became interested in really becoming skilled at fishing. I participated in the "Becoming an Outdoors Woman" held by the Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife. It was fun and it gave me a sense of independence and accomplishment to learn about the outdoors and acquire skills such as fishing. While growing up, my family went crabbing. I have fond memories of being with my sisters and my dad trying to catch enough crabs to take home and have a feast. My dad fished with his dad. My husband is an avid fisherman. He was lucky enough to grow up in the Midwest near a trout stream. He loves to tell stories about how he, his brothers, and his friends would just take off by themselves for a whole day and go fishing. He still does that today. During our summer vacation at the beach, we fished in the surf and even had my five-year-old niece reel in a fish. She was so excited! My brother-in-law took me fishing with my young nephews on the bay in his boat and they out-fished us both. The boys were so proud of the flounder that they caught!!

It bothers me to pick up the paper and read about the many deaths due to drugs and alcohol. When I ask teens why they drink alcohol and try drugs, many say that they are bored. They also say that they are stressed. To me, that means that they have only learned how to be entertained and not how to entertain themselves in a healthy way. Kids and teens need to explore on their own without adult rules and constant adult supervision. Teens and kids need to learn how to relax. One way teens and kids can do that is to learn outdoor skills like fishing.

Think about it---anybody can fish because fishing is for people of all ages. Young kids can learn to cast or drop some handline in the bay to catch crabs. Teens, adults, and senior citizens can fish. Men and women can fish. It truly is one sport that can be a lifelong hobby. It is not expensive to fish. A starter fishing pole can be bought at a department store for under \$20. You can dig up your own bait for free---worms. You can fish in a pond, a river, a lake, the bay, and the ocean. You can fish alone or with a friend. You can fish at a state park, at the beach, or on a boat. My kids fished in a stream behind

the school in our neighborhood. Fishing is a great way to escape from the hectic pace of every day life, to unwind, and to feel rejuvenated without drugs or alcohol.

Obesity is the buzz word for health educators today. Fishing is a way to do something outdoors in the fresh air instead of sitting in front of a television, computer or video game, which seems to go hand in hand with eating snacks that tend to pack on the calories.

I just became an instructor for a program entitled, "Hooked on Fishing Not on Drugs." The program is used in over 30 states in the United States, including Delaware. What I love about it is that adults can mentor kids and teach them to fish and then they can teach other kids to fish. It teaches children to be active and enjoy nature. It teaches children to learn about their environment and how to protect it. It teaches children social skills because they have to learn to be patient and problem solve. Kids learn coordination. They learn to communicate with adults as well as their peers and they gain self-confidence in themselves. You can teach kids how to cook fish, which is one of the healthiest foods to eat. But the best part is the fun of catching a fish.

Our whole class went fishing and it is addictive. The look on someone's face when they catch their first fish – young and old alike – is wonderful. Everyone has a big grin and wants to show off their catch. Can you take my picture with my fish? What kind of fish did you catch? Who caught the most? What bait did you use? Who caught the smallest fish? We caught starfish, mussels, croakers, sea bass, and pinfish. We brought one fish back to create a fish print, which makes beautiful art. I was able to keep several of my fish to eat and what a meal we had.

I think we could help keep many kids away from drugs and alcohol by connecting with them through fishing. What a great way to spend time with your children and their friends in a healthy and fun way. So what are you waiting for --- grab your family and a fishing pole and get addicted --- get hooked on fishing! For more information on the program, you can contact the Cooperative Extension office or the Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife, or visit www.futurefisherman.org.