

Hunting Guide Best Practices

Oklahoma Youth Hunting Program, Inc.

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Introduction

Oklahoma Youth Hunting Program is proud to claim that our hunting experiences are as diverse as the participants and volunteers who come from across this state to attend one of our various fall deer hunts. You may attend a hunt with one hunt master this year and then attend a different one next year with another hunt master, and notice a substantial difference between the two hunts. However, what you would also notice is that though some activities are carried out in different ways, they still occur at each and every one of our hunts. The goal of this guide is to familiarize the new guide with our general practices and procedures so that you know what to expect when you attend any of Oklahoma Youth Hunting Program's fall deer hunts. We want you to be as prepared as possible to help us carry out our mission of giving a positive, safe, and fun experience to all of the young men and women that we serve. Keeping that in mind, this guide sets forth minimum practices and standards. With the exception of certain things that will be discussed in detail in this guide which must be strictly adhered to, there are many other areas where the guide (with hunt master approval) may expand upon based upon your experience and knowledge.

Your hunt master will be the best source of information for you regarding any particulars of the hunt you will be attending. You are also welcome to speak with any Board member if you have any questions about what this guide contains. Oklahoma Youth Hunting Program, Inc. welcomes you and appreciates your commitment to guiding a youth for us this year.

I. Policies and Procedures

Oklahoma Youth Hunting Program, Inc. ("OYHP") strives to ensure the integrity of its program and the safety of all of our participants through setting some basic standards and policies that must be uniformly followed not just at our fall hunts, but at any OYHP event. The policies and procedures that pertain to you, as a guide for OYHP, are discussed below. Please take the time to review and become familiar with these policies.

A. Non-fraternization policy

It is OYHP's policy that OYHP volunteers will not fraternize with any youth participant. Public displays of affection amongst adult volunteers in the presence of youth participants is discouraged and should be avoided.

B. Gender separation

Males and females will sleep in separate sleeping quarters during OYHP hunts. Husbands and wives and/or families may sleep together, but must provide their own sleeping quarters. At some of our hunts, either males or females may be quartered in the same building where the cooking facilities are. Be respectful of others who may be getting dressed in the morning or preparing for bed in the evenings. Your hunt master will inform you of any pertinent details and restrictions.

C. Youth protection policy (two-adult rule)

At no time should any OYHP volunteer be alone with a youth participant. This policy does not preclude speaking with a youth participant individually when other adults are present and nearby, but you should not permit yourself to be placed in a position where there are no other adults who can see any such exchange take place.

D. Hunting blind policy

OYHP's policy is that all youth hunters, guides, and accompanying adults be in the blinds at certain times, and remain in the blind until a certain time. The times will be set forth and given to you by your hunt master during the hunts. While OYHP goes to great lengths to ensure that blinds are set up to avoid any overlapping fields of fire, the purpose of this policy is to avoid any youth participant or volunteer accidentally straying into the field of fire of another blind and being struck by accident. Keep in mind that our youth participants have never hunted before and do not have the experienced eye that you may have and an accident is a sure way to ruin an otherwise good weekend.

E. Non-denominational Christian-based beliefs

This is not a policy, but rather a procedure that applies to all OYHP events. OYHP does not require that any volunteer or participant subscribe to any particular doctrine or faith, or even that any person be a Christian in order to participate in our events. However, OYHP is based upon a non-denominational Christian doctrine. As such, prayers are given before meals and references are made to respecting God's creations. You are not required to participate or endorse any views expressed. Please address any concerns you may have with your hunt master or any board member.

F. Alcohol and Drugs

Alcohol is prohibited at OYHP functions. Likewise, any use of drugs or non-prescription controlled substances is prohibited during any OYHP event. Your hunt master has the authority to remove any participant from the premises if it is determined that he/she is in violation of this policy.

G. Firearms/rifle caliber policy

OYHP uses .243 rifles at all youth deer hunts. OYHP provides youth model .243 rifles for youth hunters to use, however you may bring your own .243 rifle if you have one, but you are not required to purchase one if you do not. OYHP has historically used similar caliber rifles, but encourages the use of .243 caliber guns. The reasoning behind this policy is that OYHP takes kids that have never hunted before and that caliber of gun has proven many times to be effective without being too much for a young man/woman who has never hunted before to handle. Your hunt master may approve a similar caliber rifle if you want to bring your own at his/her discretion. As for other firearms, part of OYHP's mission is to promote the Second Amendment; therefore, if you have a valid concealed carry permit, personal handguns are allowed at most OYHP hunts. You should check with your hunt master prior to the hunt for any hunt-specific rules concerning bringing a personal handgun with you.

II. Equipment

OYHP provides most of the equipment that is necessary for a hunt, such as food, .243 rifles for the youth hunters, hunting blinds, and sleeping arrangements. OYHP hunt sites, however, vary widely in terms of accommodations at each location. Your hunt master will give you specific information about the accommodations and facilities that will be available to you at your hunt. Based on that information, you should carefully watch the weather forecast so that you can

bring appropriate clothing and sleeping gear (e.g. sleeping bag, pad, etc.). If you are not already familiar with Oklahoma weather, the fall youth deer hunt weekend weather is typically notoriously unpredictable and varies widely from year to year. Therefore, this section will be primarily based upon equipment other than clothing and sleeping gear, except for a brief comment on hunting-style camouflage clothing.

If you are an experienced hunter, chances are you own multiple articles and kinds of camouflage hunting gear. You are welcome to bring those with you to wear. It is not, however, required that you go purchase any if you do not already have that kind of clothing. All of our hunting is done from either ground-level pop-up blinds, or stationary tower blinds that generally provide everyone with appropriate concealment for deer hunting. OYHP does not use tree stands. Most of our youth hunters and their accompanying parent/guardians do not have camouflage clothing prior to attending our hunts. OYHP hunt masters tell them to wear dark-colored or black shirts/sweatshirts. Jeans are perfectly acceptable and what most of our youth hunters, their parent/guardians, and even other guides will likely be wearing at your hunt. The remainder of this section will address other basic equipment that you may consider bringing with you to use at an OYHP hunt.

Throughout this discussion of equipment, it will be helpful to keep in mind that everything you will be doing over the weekend revolves around teaching a youth, who has no experience with hunting, how it is done and assisting them in learning how to become a successful hunter themselves. Based upon your own memory and experience of what it was like to go hunting for the very first time, you are free to bring any tools or equipment above and beyond what is discussed here that you believe will be helpful teaching tools or otherwise useful to you.

Consider the following list of suggested items:

1. Scent-blocking spray
2. Knife
3. Flashlight
4. Quiet snacks for the time spent sitting in the blind (e.g. beef jerky, soft candy, etc.)
5. Binoculars
6. Range finder
7. "Shooting sticks" (bi-pod rifle rest)
8. Camera

9. Tissues
10. Cough drops
11. Tissue/toilet paper
12. Ear protection
13. Hunter education card (if required)

Let us walk through the typical hunting day so that you may better understand why each item is included on the above list. OYHP typically divides the day into two "field outings", where you, your youth hunter, and his/her parent or guardian go into the field to an assigned hunting blind. The morning field outing typically involves being in the blinds and ready to hunt by about 5:45-6:00am and lasts until approximately 9:00am. The afternoon field outing usually begins around 4:00-4:30pm and lasts until 30 minutes after sundown, the end of legal hunting time for the day. Your hunt master will instruct you on what will be considered legal hunting times prior to each field outing. As discussed in the policies and procedures section, all persons are expected to remain in the blinds during field outing times. Procedures for taking action if your youth successfully harvests a deer during a field outing will be discussed later.

You will be shown where your assigned blind is prior to a field outing; however, it is helpful to have a flashlight to help navigate the terrain while getting to the blind in the morning and leaving in the evenings. Because field outings are several hours in length, it is also helpful to have some quiet snacks in order to calm growling stomachs and cough drops/tissues to help with the occasional dry throat or allergies.

Before leaving to go into the field to the blind it is often helpful to have a scent-blocking spray as your youth hunter likely has no prior knowledge of deer's sensory abilities. You should also check to be sure your youth has a hunter education card, deer tag, and hunting license (if required) with him/her. Make sure that your hunter is appropriately dressed for the field outing and has any prescribed medication that may be needed. Once you are satisfied that your hunter is prepared to go into the field, you will notify the hunt master that you are ready to leave. Your hunt master will assign you a rifle and ammunition for your field outing and instruct you on who will take you to your assigned blind. If there are any issues that need to be addressed, notify the hunt master so that it can be taken care of immediately before going to the blinds.

The remaining items that have not been specifically discussed here should be pretty self-explanatory. Keep in mind that the list above is not intended to be all-inclusive or restrictive in any way. While considering the policies and suggested equipment discussed above, you are free to adjust the equipment you bring with you based on your personal knowledge and experience.

III. Field Practices

A. Before Going to the Blind

Hunt masters employ many different methods to match youth hunters with OYHP hunting guides. You will generally have some time before going out to your assigned hunting area to become familiar with your youth hunter and get to know him or her and his/her guardian. This is your first chance to get to know your hunter and establish your relationship with your hunter for the weekend. You will be spending many hours in close proximity to this person and his/her guardian over the course of the next several days. Therefore, it is important that you keep an open mind and establish a dialogue with your youth hunter because he/she will depend on you to be a mentor, teacher, and friend. Sometimes what seems like a good match does not work out, so you should address any issues with your assigned hunter with the hunt master.

When your hunt master tells you whom you will be guiding for the weekend, it is your job to introduce yourself and make sure that they are ready to go into the field (e.g. they have appropriate clothing, license/tag, hunter education card, etc.). Any problems should be immediately directed to the hunt master to be addressed. Once that is done, the focus should become getting to know the youth and his/her parent/guardian. You will be spending a lot of time with them over the weekend being silent in the hunting blind(s), so it is important to establish a relationship before you begin your first field hunt.

B. In the Blind

Before the time you get to your assigned blind with your youth hunter and his/her guardian, you should have established a relationship with your hunter as discussed above. OYHP encourages guides to maintain control of the assigned gun until all persons are situated in the blind and ready to shoot. Once that is completed, you may give your assigned youth hunter control of the gun, and one (1) bullet to load in the gun. You will be given more than one (1) bullet, and your assigned rifle may hold more than one. OYHP encourages responsible shooting under the supervision and guidance of a trained guide; therefore, OYHP does not allow for more

than one shot to be taken at a time. If it is necessary to give the youth hunter additional bullets because of a missed shot, your hunt master will rely upon your judgment and decision.

Because of the proliferation of camera phones, OYHP allows youth hunters and their parent/guardians to have their cell phones in the blind. You should check to make sure that all electronic devices are set on silent mode. OYHP does not, however, allow participants to use those devices for any other purpose besides its camera function. As an OYHP hunt guide, you may use your phone to contact your hunt master or his designee if you need assistance, but should also refrain from otherwise using your phone for any other purpose than as a camera. OYHP does not wish to encourage playing games, text messaging, and so on during field outings. If your youth hunter or parent/guardian begins using their phone contrary to those guidelines, politely ask him/her to turn it off and put it away. If the person refuses to do so, contact your hunt master for additional guidance and instructions.

If a deer is successfully harvested during one of your field outings with a youth hunter, you should notify the hunt master by radio, text message, etc., so that he/she knows to send help to carry the carcass to a field dressing/butchering place at your particular hunt site. You should congratulate your hunter but should remain in your blind with your hunter until you are otherwise told to leave or until the pre-determined time to leave the blinds has occurred.

Sometimes youth hunters may hit a deer with their shot, but the deer may run or otherwise falls down and continues to kick. Keep in mind that these are inexperienced hunters who have never hunted before. If the deer runs, pay careful attention of the direction it went, and where it entered the trees/brush/etc. so that others can help find it when you notify the hunt master that your hunter has harvested a deer but it ran off.

If your hunter successfully harvests a deer and the deer falls down but is not yet dead, you may do what is necessary to dispatch the deer. OYHP suggests using a knife placed in such a position that it cuts the heart if possible, or using a knife to cut the deer's throat. Otherwise, it may be necessary to place a second shot into the deer's chest. It must be clear that as an adult volunteer, you may not fire a gun at a deer. Our hunts are during the Oklahoma Wildlife Department's scheduled youth deer rifle weekend and it is illegal for anyone over the age of 18 to fire a gun at a deer, even if it is simply to dispatch a deer that a youth has already shot. Your youth hunter must make the shot if he/she is able to do so. OYHP hunt masters will not question your judgment on what needed to be done without good reason otherwise.

If it is necessary for any person to leave the blind for any reason (e.g. bathroom, dispatch a deer, etc.), it is important that the person leaving only go as far as absolutely necessary and immediately return to the blind. OYHP does not want any accidents to occur against our volunteers or participants if someone strays into the potential field of fire from another blind. If a participant desires to leave entirely, you should immediately retrieve the gun from your hunter and make sure it is safe, then notify your hunt master of the situation so that he/she can make necessary notifications/arrangements for pickup.

Most of the time in the blinds is spent just sitting and waiting for something to happen. If you are an experienced hunter, you are likely familiar with the long waiting periods that are often involved with hunting. This is when some of the equipment discussed above is helpful to have with you. OYHP youth hunters are 12-17 years old, so binoculars and range finders provide ways for them to occupy their attention during that time. Stomachs also tend to start growling during long periods of sitting still, therefore some quiet snacks are helpful to have (e.g. beef jerky, chewable candy, etc.) as well. You may also point out other wildlife that appears and discuss (quietly) the kind of animal it is, their habits, and so on based upon your knowledge with your youth hunter. Sometimes antlered deer (“bucks”) may appear in your field of fire. This provides a good teaching opportunity for you to instruct your youth hunter about techniques for remaining calm, why he/she cannot attempt to harvest the deer (OYHP only hunts antlerless deer), and techniques for identifying the age and maturity of an antlered deer in making responsible hunting decisions in the future regarding harvesting antlered deer. Keep in mind that sitting in the blinds with you will be what that youth hunter primarily remembers of his/her OYHP hunting experience. Feel free to discuss your reasons for becoming and enjoying hunting with your youth hunter and his/her parent/guardian. Also keep in mind that you are the person in charge of the safety and well-being of yourself, your hunter, and his/her parent guardian while you are on field outings in the blinds. If something does not appear safe to you, or otherwise leads you to be uncomfortable in any way, do not hesitate to take control of the assigned rifle, make it safe, and contact your hunt master for further instructions. It is always better to err on the side of caution than it is to make a potentially costly mistake.

C. Leaving the Blind

Your hunt master will tell you prior to going to the blind when you should leave. All OYHP participants should remain in their assigned blinds until this time, unless there is some

kind of emergency or other issue that necessitates leaving the blind early. This procedure ensures the safety of all participants through assurance that no participant may stray into the field of fire of another blind.

IV. Fellowship/Weekend Campfire

On Saturday evening of the hunt weekend, OYHP hunts participate in a fellowship event, usually around a camp fire unless there is a burn ban in effect. The idea behind the event is to reflect upon the weekend and what each participant has experienced and wishes to share with others. There is still an additional opportunity for a field outing the next morning for the hunters who have not yet harvested a deer to go out again, but those who have already harvested a deer are given “First Deer Certificates” that are available from the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife. There is no set format for these events, and each hunt master does it according to their individual style and focus areas. Your hunt master will instruct you on what you should expect and should be prepared for.

V. Field Dressing

There are many ways to field dress a deer, and your hunt master may have a preferred method for guides to use.