

THE BOOTSTRAP PHILOSOPHY

Never force a child to come to the hives. Always invite. Give them ownership — "your bees need you." Let them set the pace entirely. A child who comes to the hives because they want to be there is a completely different beekeeper than one who was dragged along. The curiosity has to be theirs.

BEFORE ANYONE COMES NEAR THE HIVES

- Check the hive mood first. Even calm colonies have bad days. Read entrance activity and early frame behavior before bringing children or new visitors close.
- Check for known allergies. Anyone with a history of severe reactions to bee stings should see an allergist before participating. Carry an epinephrine auto-injector (EpiPen) at the apiary.
- Teach the slow walk. Before they ever suit up: if you say step back, they turn slowly and walk away from the hives. Never run. Bees track fast movement.
- Suit up completely. Children should wear a properly fitted bee suit, veil, and gloves every time — no exceptions until they have years of experience and you know exactly how the colony responds.
- Start with observation. Let them watch from a comfortable distance first. No pressure to get closer. Curiosity will do the rest.

■ **ALLERGY AWARENESS:** Bee sting allergy is rare in children (under 1% severe reaction) but can be life-threatening. Signs of anaphylaxis include hives spreading beyond the sting site, swelling of face/throat, difficulty breathing, or dizziness. Call 911 immediately. Keep an EpiPen at your apiary at all times. Consult your doctor if you have any family history of sting allergy before beginning beekeeping with children.

AGE-APPROPRIATE INVOLVEMENT

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| Under 5 | Observe from a distance only. Watch bees at the entrance, learn to be calm and still near the yard. No suit required at distance. Focus on curiosity — books, honey tasting, bee-themed activities indoors. |
| Ages 5–9 | Suited up and close to the hive. Can watch an open inspection, hold tools, learn hive parts by name, and assist with tasks like painting hive bodies or filling feeders. With calm colonies and good temperament, may hold a frame under direct supervision. |
| Ages 10+ | Can participate in most hive tasks with supervision — inspections, frame work, feeding, basic pest management. Begin learning to read the bees and identify normal vs concerning behavior. |
| Teens | Can operate independently with an experienced beekeeper present. Learn mite washing, treatment decisions, record keeping, and seasonal management. |

BUILDING THE CONNECTION

- Give them ownership. A hive with their name on it changes everything.
- Answer every question like it is a good one — because to them it is.
- Let them carry things, name things, and make small decisions.
- Do not talk about stings before they ask. Let the bees be interesting first.
- Teach them the vocabulary naturally — they will absorb it when they care about the subject.
- Let them say goodbye to the bees. The emotional connection matters more than the technique at this stage.

"The bees don't care what you paid for your equipment. They just need someone willing to show up and do the work." The same is true of the people learning alongside you.

WHAT TO DO WHEN SOMEONE GETS STUNG

- Stay calm. Your reaction sets the tone.
- Remove the stinger immediately by scraping sideways with a fingernail or card — do not squeeze it.
- Wash the area with soap and water. Apply a cold pack to reduce swelling.
- Watch for systemic symptoms for 30 minutes: hives spreading beyond the sting site, throat tightening, difficulty breathing, dizziness. If any appear, call 911 and administer epinephrine if available.
- For normal local reactions (pain, redness, swelling at sting site): over-the-counter antihistamine and cold pack. Monitor.
- A sting does not have to end the experience. Stay calm, treat it matter-of-factly, and let the child lead on whether they want to continue.