JUNIOR GOLF

GROUP THERAPY

Practicing and playing golf as a family is a fun way to relax and enjoy the game and each other's company. **BY GLENN DECK, PGA**

GLENN DECK ALIGNS KELAN LONG AS LONG'S SISTER, KARLY, AND MOTHER, ROBERTA, AWAIT THEIR CHIPPING TIPS.

Golf is a family game that can last a lifetime if you make it fun. Besides its recreational value, the game also provides a number of lessons your children can benefit from as they transition to adulthood.

Many parents want their child to be the next superstar on a professional tour. While that would be great, he or she likely won't take to the game unless it appeals to them, which is where creating fun events for the family comes in. And if your child shows an interest in golf but you don't play, becoming familiar with the game's terminology and taking a few lessons will give you more chances to bond and compete for good-natured bragging rights at the dinner table.

To initially learn the game, search the Internet for basic rules and fundamentals. You'll only need a few clubs to start, such as a putter, sand wedge and driver. Then find a practice facility or course near you and prepare to start golfing as a family.

Here are a few ways to make it fun:

1. Start close to the hole with short and straight putts. Put four tees in the ground at 1-foot intervals and practice making putts, from front to back, from those distances. If you miss one, start over until you regularly make four in a row.

2. After consistently making short putts, start putting from a minimum of 20 feet and get the ball in the hole in the fewest strokes. After getting comfortable with the speed and feel, create fun putting games on the green.

3. Hit chip shots just off the green. For a good visual, put down four tees and, if possible, use alignment sticks or rope to make an open-ended, 12-foot box with the hole in the center. Have a contest to see who can get the most balls inside the box.

4. Take a family golf lesson to learn fundamentals. Let your teacher know to keep it simple because you're getting started and want to have fun as a group. There's a good chance he or she will know some games to play on the range or practice green.

5. Work on your grip, balance and aim before hitting balls. Focus on how to set up correctly to the ball instead of worrying about distance or accuracy. Since you're getting started, it's OK if you miss the ball. Start with short swings to make solid contact and progress to longer swings once you've achieved some success. You only need a few clubs when learning.

6. When ready to play, go with a golfer who is more experienced. He or she can help with rules, etiquette and make you more comfortable. It's OK, or recommended, for beginners to start on a par-3 or an executive course and to play the most forward set of tees on a regular course. And don't feel like you need to play all 18 holes; nine are plenty for golfers starting out.

7. Play team golf, or a scramble format, if one or two family members is struggling that day. That way you can help each other get around the course as a group. If you're unfamiliar with scrambles or other golf games, search the Internet or ask an experienced friend to explain the concepts.

8. Don't keep score. Just enjoy the good shots and appreciate that you're outdoors and having fun as a family. When starting out, scorecards can be a hindrance to enjoyment and lead to discouragement if it isn't your day.

9. Keep the practice sessions short until everyone wants to stay longer, and take them out for a treat afterwards to thank them for participating in a family activity.

No matter what you do, it needs to be fun. After that, golf's lessons on patience, hard work, competition, honor, integrity and etiquette will come naturally and be more acceptable. Golf is a good family experience, so make it an event and enjoy the sunshine, camaraderie and some of our gorgeous courses in the area. SG

GOLDENRULES

Golf is a game of enjoyment and respect – for yourself, others and your surroundings. If you're beginning, kept these conduct ideas in mind:

- Try your best when playing or practicing.
- Have a positive attitude, regardless of the outcome.
- Be honest with yourself when it comes to rules and keeping score.
- Follow all instructions and safety rules.
- Be friendly, courteous and helpful to other golfers.
- Be a good sport whether you won, lost, had a good round or a poor one.
- Use proper etiquette and stay composed, even when others aren't watching.
- Keep the golf course and practice areas clean and in good shape.
- Learn different practice games but make sure they match the skill level of everyone in the family before making them part of your routine.

Glenn Deck is a Golf Magazine Top 100 Teacher and director of instruction at Pelican Hill Golf Club in Newport Coast, where a family golf lesson is part of the curriculum.

JON ENCARNACION

THE LONGS LEARN THAT PUTTING GAMES AND DRILLS CAN BE FUN WHEN DONE AS A FAMILY AT PELICAN HILL.