

Safety Around the Beehive



Age group: All ages – for any student who will be near the beehive.

Timeframe: 5 min – demonstrations; 10-15 min – hands on activities

Nutshell: Students learn the behavior expectations and safety instructions for being near a beehive. This is meant as an introduction for students before their first experience with the hive, either for a demonstration or hands-on learning opportunity.

Supplies:

- Flags or line marking off areas where students should stand while observing or working with hive. Recommended distances:
 - For demonstrations: 30+ ft away from hive
 - For hands-on learning: 20 ft or less from hive
 - Note: Exact distances depend on bee behavior, number of hives, and comfort levels of students.
- Bee suits, smoker, and hive tools – for hands-on learning

Set-up:

- Allergy Information: Make sure you have it for all students. If you have a student with a severe allergy, it is up to you and the parent/adult leader to decide what is a safe distance from the hive. At the Youth Farm, we do not involve any students with severe bee-sting allergies in beekeeping activities. We also require any students with severe allergies to bring their own epi-pen to the farm.
- Gather students in a learning circle at a distance from the hive, so the hive does not become a distraction while you are giving instructions.

Basic Information for all Students

- **Honey bees are not naturally aggressive:** They do not “want” to sting you. In fact, they sting you, they die. Honeybees will only sting if they feel like their hive is in danger. What are some things that might make bees feel like they are in danger? (Sudden movements or loud noises, swatting or killing bees, running around, etc.) Note that honeybees are different than wasps and other types of bees.
- **Best behavior traits around the hive:** Remain calm, use slow movements, encourage others/be positive, treat bees with respect. Some people say that bees react to your behavior. If you are agitated, they will be agitated.
- **What to do if you feel nervous:** Simply move further away from the hive. It is ok if you need to leave and go do a different activity on the farm instead!
- **Stings can happen, sometimes:** Even on our best behavior, sometimes a bee will sting. Stings hurt for a minute, but then stop hurting. If you get stung, the best thing you can do is walk away from the hive. An adult will help you take care of your sting. Note: I like to be up front about this, so that students are not

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surprised if the bees do sting. My goal is to instill caution in students, not fear. The goal is to accept the reality, and help students master their fears through the experience. (Or, to help seemingly 'fearless' students make good decisions and respect others' fears.)

For Demonstrations

This is for students or adults who will be observing the hive from a distance – usually 30 ft or more away from the hive. We do not require protective equipment for this, as long as the bees are not being aggressive at the time (this is rare); students must stay in the designated observation area, and not get closer to the hive. It is good to have extra adult chaperones to monitor curious students.

- Have an adult leader lead students in a single file to line up in the observing area, side by side so everyone can see the hive.
- Tell students you will come around with a frame of bees to give them a closer look. If anyone does not want to see the bees up close, have them give a thumbs down – then you will know not to come close to that student with the bees.

For Hands-on Activities with the Hive

This is for students or adults who will be observing or working with the bees up close – up to 20 ft away from the hive or closer. We require all students to wear protective equipment to participate. Best for groups of 8 or less students – more gets crowded.

- Hands-on beekeeping is always a choice activity – we never require students to participate.
- After giving the basic behavior instructions above, while still away from the hive, help students put on their bees suits. Check all suits.
- Anticipate student behavior issues, and know what you will do if a student starts horseplay, gets very nervous, gets stung, etc. Usually the answer is to help them walk away from the hive. For this reason, having another adult around to attend to these students can be very helpful.
- When you approach the hive, stop when you are 40-50 ft away and make sure all students are calm, and remember what to do if they get nervous: walk away. This is also a good opportunity to light the smoker and talk about what it does.
- Designate an area for students to stand so that everyone can see – an arc 10 ft from the hive works well. Students can always stand further away if they like – allow students to choose a distance that matches their comfort level.
- Allow students to approach the hive more closely if their behavior is good and they are comfortable. Ask students if they would like to try different jobs – take turns if necessary. Here is a typical progression, from beginner to more advanced:
 - Stand next to hive
 - Use smoker
 - Look for eggs /larvae/pupae – observe adult bees up close
 - Hold a frame

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- Use hive tool to scrape off burr comb
- Help lift a box
- Use hive tool to lift out a frame
- Honey harvest (brush bees off of frame)
- Teach others

Tips and Tricks for Hands-on Hive Activities:

- Double check all student bee outfits before approaching hive – students often have trouble tying and tucking everything properly.
- While at the hive, demonstrate the behavior you want your students to exhibit – if you are calm, they are more likely to be calm

Recommended Equipment for Hands-on Hive Activities

- Smoker, with fuel and lighter (we use paper egg cartons and wood chips for fuel)
- Hive tools (1 for instructor, plus 1-2 for students to share)
- 1-2 bee brushes
- Sting-relief pads, in case of sting
- Protective bee suit. This can be purchased through most apiary suppliers, or you can assemble a “homemade” suit from the following pieces:
 - Wide-brimmed hat with netting (these can be purchased for \$5-\$15; some beekeepers do make their own)
 - Loose fitting dress shirt, with collar turned up; shirt tucked in.
 - Hospital “scrub” pants, or loose-fitting jeans
 - Close-toed shoes with tall socks. Tuck pants into socks.
 - Rubber bands, to close off sleeves – you don’t want a bee flying up your sleeve and getting stuck. This is a guaranteed sting!
 - Thick gloves – long beekeepers gloves are easiest, but garden work gloves can also be used, with sleeves pulled down and rubber banded. **Note: We do not require students to wear gloves, if they feel comfortable without them. Many beekeepers do not wear gloves, as it gives more dexterity when handling frames. We do require students to wear the rest of the gear.**
- Proper set up for homemade bee costume:



This lesson was developed by [Madison, Wisconsin](#)



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