



# How to Start A USPSA Junior Team

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# Starting a USPSA Junior Team

This guide is put together to help you or your club start a USPSA Junior Team. It is not an answer to every question or situation that arises during the process and it is not always right. I hope you have as much fun as I have in working with young people who get very excited about our shooting sport. These hints and notes are things that I have picked up in building our junior team in the Columbia Cascade Section. If your efforts only reach one junior then you have succeeded in building a team and they will never forget the experience. So my recommendation is to dive in and give it a try. Please pardon my '*side notes*' as you read through this guide, they are lessons that we have learned in building our junior teams and I want to give you the benefit of our mistakes.

## Putting the Concept Together

The key to a USPSA junior team is finding that one adult who steps forward and offers to take the lead. This person doesn't have to be a Grand Master or a USPSA life member, just a person who loves the sport and wants to share it with young people. The first step is to put a team plan together and it should contain the following items;

1. Where will the team meet and practice? This is usually one gun club or shooting range that gives you permission to practice at their shooting facility. Make sure you have the club's leadership permission and find out if you need to meet any special requirements to use the facility. Note: if you have support of a gun club or shooting range you also have an excellent source of junior members just waiting to hear about your program.
2. How often do you want to meet? This will depend on what type of training program you put together and how often your juniors shoot in USPSA matches. I will talk about a training program later in this guide.
3. Put together a description of the sport that you can give to interested juniors and parents that describe what is involved in USPSA shooting sports. A good resource is the USPSA DVD available from USPSA's office in Sedro Woolley, Washington. The one issue you want to make sure you mention up front is safety and how safe our sport is compared to many other organized sports. Many parents of junior age participants have not been raised around firearms and when you mention what we do to compete I can guarantee you they want to know about safety. Be sure to include what each junior needs to compete and how much it will cost them for practice and to shoot your local matches. Answer the question up front about how old a junior needs to be to participate in USPSA shooting sports. I

respond to this question by explaining it is not age that determines if they can participate, it is safety. If they are under the age of 18 and can handle a handgun safely and I mean a 9mm, minor power factor, pistol safely they can join the team. I have seen 11 year olds that can handle handguns safely and 14 year olds who can't.

*Side Note: When we put our initial junior team together there were 3 boys including my grandson. Each month we would gain two or three more juniors just through word of mouth until we ended up with 12 juniors on the team. About half of the juniors who wanted to join the team did not have parents shooting firearms. I would ask the junior, who was interested in joining the team, to bring at least one of their parents or grandparents out to our monthly match. You can write all the explanations in the world and show people pictures of what we do but when you show them an actual match and how safe we are you will almost always gain a team member. Besides, USPSA shooting sports is one of those sports where everyone in the family can compete at the same time.*

4. Now that you have a plan and a place to meet it is time to get the word out about a USPSA Junior meeting just like people do with little league baseball. Print up a flier, ask if you can put it up in the gun club where you to practice, sporting goods stores and pass them around to anyone who has juniors that might be interested in taking a look at a exciting junior activity. You will be amazed at how many families show up. A good idea here it to schedule a meeting like this on a Saturday afternoon and if possible have a small shooting stage set up so everyone can see what you are talking about.

*Side Note: We are putting one of these meetings together every 4- 6 months and that is the only time we are adding new members to our junior team. Why are we restricting new juniors to every 4-6 months? When you set up a training program to start juniors out with the basics to this sport it is hard to bring new juniors in partially through the training sequence. If you start a new junior group every 4-6 months you make sure every junior gets the right start to the sport and more experienced juniors get to move forward in their training. Besides you can use the experienced juniors to help train the new juniors, which is a great team building and mentoring system.*

# How to Equip a Junior Team

Now you may think that I got the cart before the horse when I started talking about recruiting a junior team before I knew how you were going to supply them with everything they need to practice or compete. When we started our first team I went to our local club and asked if they would buy two used Glock 17 pistols (police trade ins), holster / belts, magazines and 5,000 rounds of ammunition. I have to tell you the executive board voted unanimously in favor of the purchase to get juniors involved in shooting sports.

***Side Note: I picked Glock 17 pistols because they were guns that could compete safely right out of the box. Glock supported all inspections and repairs through their Glock Armor program. Plus we wanted to start juniors out in the USPSA Production Division to get the basics down before they moved on to high capacity Limited or Open guns. Not to mention that magazines were very reasonable price wise. Please be aware that the Glock 17 does not like a weak grip, which could present a problem with juniors, however it does indicate that there is a gripping problem.***

Now, how are you going to equip a junior team? When we started our team juniors shared hand guns, magazines and holster rigs. As we started shooting matches I found people wanted to donate to the program and it made it easier to equip our juniors. Here are some ideas to get the equipment for your junior team:

1. Find out if you have any current USPSA competitors who would be willing to loan a firearm to a junior and or sponsor a junior. You would be surprised how many people have an extra firearm that would work for a junior.
2. Find out if your gun club or USPSA Section would be willing to help you get started by purchasing a handgun and holster rig.
3. Approach your local NRA chapter and put in a grant to help get the equipment you need.
4. Yes, you can always approach your local sporting good suppliers or gun manufacturers to see if they will loan, give or discount equipment to you.
5. Ask the USPSA Junior Coordinator if he has any equipment available to start up your junior team.

***Side Note: If you acquire firearms for your team it is not a good idea to let them go home with a junior team member even if their parent says it is okay. That is a liability I don't think you want to deal with. We always let our juniors take holster rigs and belts home if we have enough of them but I lock the junior team handguns up either at my home or in our club gun vault.***

6. It is surprising how fast juniors, once they get on the team, come up with their own firearm and many times their parents start shooting too.
7. Ask your club or section if they are willing to donate the proceeds from one of their matches to the junior program.

***Side Note: At the 2006 Area 1 Championships we raised almost \$3,000 through donations and special shoots that we used to take 6 juniors to the 2006 USPSA Nationals. Make sure you keep excellent financial records of all funds donated to your program. In 2007 we had two clubs in the section give \$1 per match competitor to the junior program throughout the entire year.***

8. Ammunition gets very expensive and you may have to ask parents to purchase it or sometimes you get it donated. It is important that juniors make a financial commitment if they are interested in shooting sports and we have discovered a few ways they can make money at the gun club to help pay for their expenses.
  - a. Pick up used brass, clean it, bag it and sell it to people who want to reload.
  - b. We collect \$2 from every competitor, above the match fee, and give the money to our juniors to tear down the match and put everything away. You would be surprised how many competitors love the idea of not having to tear down after the match.
  - c. Now we hire juniors to help set up props on the day before the match instead of giving discounts to regular competitors who used to show up prior to the match to set up.

***Side Note: We require all of our junior team to help with match set up as part of their reduced fee to shoot the match. It also gives them an idea of stage construction.***

9. We have recently put together a reloading place for our junior team and will start helping them reload ammunition for their practice sessions and matches. This is all part of the learning curve with new juniors.

# Junior Practice Sessions

It is important that you have firm team rules in place prior to starting your first junior practice session. USPSA does not have a junior membership and we treat juniors just like any adult who starts shooting this sport. This is not a junior sport and they need to understand this from the very beginning. They will be using real firearms and live ammunition to practice and compete with. We make all of our juniors go through the same safety workbook that any new adult goes through before they put one hand on a firearm in a practice session or match.

***Side Note: This safety manual is available through our section website at [www.columbia-cascade.org](http://www.columbia-cascade.org). I wrote the manual several years ago and we have used it, updated as rules changed, with every new competitor since. It is not an official USPSA publication; it is only a tool in teaching safety and our sport.***

Here is a list of team rules we use for our junior team:

1. Your actions while at any gun club or shooting range reflect on the image of our junior team. This is an adult sport and you will be held accountable for your actions at the range.
2. All safety rules have to be followed at all times. If you break the rules you will be disqualified just like any other competitor.
3. When you are shooting with a squad you do more work than the other members of the squad. You don't sit back and let other people do all the work, you tape and set steel just like everyone else.
4. You follow all USPSA rules and understand if you cheat you will suffer the consequences. But also understand that if you make an honest mistake it is part of learning.
5. Help your fellow junior team member whenever possible, if the rules allow it. Support your fellow junior team members and encourage them.

Here is a list of things you should think about and have put together for junior practice sessions:

1. Make sure every junior has their USPSA release forms and any additional club forms filled out. I fill these out even if they are not a member of USPSA yet.
2. Make up a registration form, for your records, that includes name, address, contact information, parent's names, school, other activities of interest, clothing sizes and shooting goals. This information really comes in handy.
3. Make sure every junior has filled out their safety manual and has safety gear (eyes and ears) on properly.
4. Develop a training program that starts a new junior out with the basics first. Before you put a handgun in their hand make sure they know how it

- operates, what each part does and how the gun works. Explain stance, grip, sight pattern, trigger pull and accuracy. We have put together a 6 session training package that we want to start our juniors with and it is included in this guide. Where you go after 6 sessions depends on how your juniors are doing and what you want them to work on, i.e. moving and shooting, moving targets, etc.
5. Keep your first training session short and fun. Remember their muscles will get tired fast and bad habits will start to set in if you shoot too much too soon. It is also important that you put fun into the training sessions or they will get board.

*Side note: I start all juniors shooting one round at a time from a shooting bench at an IPSC target with a black dot (about the size of a quarter) in the center of the target, at 5 yards. This gives me a chance to evaluate each one. Now after about 10 rounds I move them to the free hand standing position with no support and do it again. After each round I have them "unload and show clear" then I give them the "make ready" command after looking at their targets. This reinforces the shooting commands they hear during competitions. If everyone seems to be doing okay we move out onto the shooting bay where they stand 5 yards in front of the target, gun in holster (unloaded). I give the "make ready" command with one round and have them holster the gun. Going through the same commands of "Are you ready, stand bye" and when the timer sounds they draw slowly and fire that one round into the 'A' zone. Unload and show clear then check to see who hit the 'A' zone. Now if they did hit the 'A' zone they take one step back away from the target and they load a full 10 round magazine into their handgun using the proper commands. Those who didn't hit the 'A' zone sit down and we keep going through the exercise until there is only one junior left.*

6. After finishing the first three training sessions, which covers the basics in USPSA shooting, we set up a very simple stage. Make sure it has both paper and steel, movement and enough targets that they have to do a reload. You, ahead of time, walk through the stage and shoot it while walking (don't run it fast). Figure out the hit factor of your run and set a minimum hit factor for your juniors. Again, don't go too fast this is only what I call a 'qualifying stage' that gives you some indication they are ready to shoot in a match. If they reach that hit factor they can shoot in a USPSA match.

*Side Note: We made a mistake in the beginning by letting our juniors start shooting matches too soon. This resulted in wasting ammunition, hurt feelings because they couldn't hit steel and little sense of accomplishment. The tendency is to go too fast too soon and that starts bad habits. Take it slower and make sure they are ready to shoot a match. I know they will be*

***chomping at the bit to get into a match sooner but it will pay off in the long run if you make sure they are ready to shoot a match.***

7. Here is a list of 6 training sessions that we have put together for new juniors. This is only a guide so modify your training schedule based on how your juniors are doing and what you want to teach them.
  - a. Session One - Talk about safety gear (eyes and ears) and how important it is. Go over the safety rules and ask if there are any questions. Explain how a firearm works, bullets, magazines and sights. Show the proper grip, shooting stance, trigger squeeze or press and what happens if any part of the basics are wrong. Set up one close target and get them started shooting off the bench or table without drawing the gun. Start with just one shot and evaluate what they might be doing if they are not hitting close to the center of the target. I usually put a black piece of tape or paster in the center of the target to help them focus are where they should be hitting. Watch for jerking the trigger or flinching. Note: sometimes double ear protection helps against flinching when the firearm goes off. Each time you have them shoot go through the USPSA commands and stress muzzle direction and safety. After they shoot 10 or more rounds from the bench we have them shoot freehanded and work on the stance. After a couple of shots I tell them I will give \$1 to the first person who hits the dot. This reinforces accuracy, adds a little pressure and a whole lot of fun. Remember to keep fun in your training and recognize good shooting. After about 10 rounds we set up our target line and do a game I call 'Last Man Standing'. This finishes the training on a fun experience and gives them the desire to do better next time. For each junior set up one target at 5 yards. Everyone lines up in front of their target, instructions are given about shooting one shot (no time limit) and hitting the 'A' zone. USPSA commands are given and the timer goes 'beep'. If they hit the 'A' zone then they get to step back one step and we do it again until there is the 'Last Man Standing'.

***Side Note: If you are short on juniors and have the firearms let any of the parents who want to participate join in on 'Last Man Standing'. This brings some more fun to the exercise and I would bet a new USPSA shooting parent to the sport.***

- b. Second Session – Go over everything talked about in session one, especially safety. Set up to shoot everything that was shot in session one but now add the draw and shoot two rounds on every target. Talk about sight picture on the second shot and how important it is to

see the sights before squeezing the trigger. End the session with 'Last Man Standing' and two 'A' hits on the target. Note: you can go through 'Last Man Standing' as often as you want but be sure to recognize the winner. This is where you see junior girls excel more often than not.

- c. Third Session – Reinforce what was talked about in the first two sessions. Start with a simple accuracy drill and then move the target out to 10 yards, then 15 yards. In all the drills accuracy is a must, don't let them be satisfied with 'C' hits. After the accuracy drill add another target and steel targets. Work them thru two shots on paper and knocking steel down. Talk to them about 'missing fast' on steel and how hitting the steel is just as important as hitting the 'A' zone on paper. Finish up this training session with your 'Qualifier Stage'. Explain what they have to do and what hit factor they have to obtain in order to shoot in a USPSA match. This may not seem fair when adults and other people don't have to prove their skills to shoot in a USPSA match, however I think they will understand if you explain the purpose behind this process, I know their parents will.
- d. Fourth Session – Continue to reinforce basics from previous sessions. Talk about working on weak areas and add moving targets to the practice session. Show the basics surrounding magazine changes. Add to this session what needs to be done for match organization and preparation. Set up one target, one steel and one swinger for this exercise. Show them the sequence in shooting this target array and run them thru it several times. Now ask them as a group what they would like to work on and let them work at it. Set up the 'Qualifier Stage' and give the juniors a chance to earn their way to shooting in a USPSA match.
- e. Fifth Session – Follow the reinforcement routine and add strong hand – weak hand to their training. Caution your juniors about safety when talking about strong and weak hand shooting, gun transition and clearing jams. In addition, talk about classifier stages and work with barricades and boxes. Finish up this session with the 'Qualifier Stage' and the 'Last Man Standing' for fun. 'Last Man Standing' will always give you and the junior an idea of their accuracy.
- f. Sixth Session – Teach each junior to practice on what they think is their own weak area. This is an important step, even for adults. Recognize your weak area and then practice to improve it.

# Match Preparation and Shooting in a Match

Prior to shooting in a junior's first match we talk about how to prepare for a match and what goals to set. Here is an example of what we go through.

1. Make up an equipment list, so you don't forget what to bring.
2. Talk about dressing for any kind of weather.
3. What to eat and what to stay away from eating prior to a match.
4. Bring your money for an entry fee.
5. Bring plenty of water or athletic drinks, stay away from the caffeine.
6. What goals are you going to set (shooting a stage clean, shooting a match clean, being as safe as possible, shooting all "A"s on a stage). Always set a goal before the match and get each junior to talk about it.

During the match I try to get each junior to tell me exactly how they are going to shoot a stage, where they might find problems and what safety issues might come into play. We talk to our juniors from the very first stage of their first match to help tape targets and set steel. It is also important to remind them to follow the range officer's scoring sequence when tapping targets. In addition, we talk about when to get ready to shoot a stage so you know what you are going to do and after shooting the stage how to get ready for the next stage by reloading magazines and getting your gear ready.

When a junior finishes a stage find something you can compliment them on and if needed some area where they can improve. High "5"s are great plus show them how to encourage other juniors.

***Side note: When I talk to a junior one on one I ask them to look me straight to my face. This lets me know they are listening to what I'm saying and that I'm not mad at them. Sometimes you only have a few minutes to catch their attention between shooters and it is important to get the right message across to them.***

At the end of the match we talk about areas to improve upon, mistakes made and what we want to work on in practice sessions before the next match. As each junior develops show them how to look at their scores and where they would place if they improved their hits and eliminated their mistakes. We don't talk about speed because that will come with time (no pun intended).

## Shooting in Bigger Matches

Try to get your juniors involved in shooting bigger matches when you feel they are ready. Money and traveling might be a problem, so you need to be sensitive to these issues. If you can develop some fund raiser matches or other ideas this can help defray the cost. There is nothing wrong with asking for support from the regular shooters to see if any of them will sponsor a junior at a larger section, area or national match, you might be surprised when you ask.

*Side note: Please be aware that it is hard to shoot competitively for yourself when you have junior shooters shooting with you. The satisfaction is seeing how well they do in the match instead of how well you do. If you take a junior to a larger match you are putting yourself in 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> place behind their needs.*

Make sure you have everything organized between parents, schedules set, equipment ready and all the necessary forms filled out prior to the event.

*Side note: We shut down the Portland Airport security lines on one of our trips because there were magazines, and I don't mean the reading type, in the carry on baggage. It was my fault and I received a letter a month later from Homeland Security chastising me for the problem.*

When you take juniors to a bigger match you are a substitute mom or dad, even if the parents are there so don't forget to take some good pictures because they will remember it forever.

## How to Keep the Team Going

This is another area where there is no secret to keeping the team going. Our junior team is over two years into the process and we have past juniors, 18 and 19 year olds, coming back to help coach the new juniors.

*Side note: I had one junior come to me, almost in tears, because he was turning 18 and still wanted to shoot with the rest of the team. Tell me about the rewards of working with youth.*

As you work with juniors there will be parents who step forward to help. Always think how you can bring them into the team to help you. Most of the time they

are just waiting to help but don't want to get in your way. Use these parents along with other experienced shooters and past juniors to help train new juniors safely. Never forget safety in this sport.

Bring as much recognition to the junior team as possible with announcements, awards, photos and don't forget team shirts. Nothing brings a team closer together than when they get a team shirt.

## **Last but not Least**

It is hard to put down on paper everything that you learn in working with juniors. I've only scratched the surface and would like the opportunity to show anyone who is interested how to start a USPSA Junior Team but the reality is all it takes is one adult to raise their hand and say I will do it. Shooting is like any other individual sport, it is selfish at times because a shooter wants to do the best. When you give some of yourself towards helping juniors there is a different kind of payback. Give it a try and see what I mean.

Don't forget to keep me posted on how your doing, both the good and the bad. Maybe all of us working together can make a difference in this sport.