

Main article: 721 words

Sidebar: 263 words

Three scalable photos attached. Captions below and numbered.

–Another "Boat Responsibly!" Reminder from the United States Coast Guard –

Big Tips for Little Boaters

Children's Life Jackets are Easy to Fit, and Wear

With recreational boating becoming more and more a family activity, making the experience safe for the kids becomes a priority. Although no parent can protect their child from every danger, a good start is to make sure kids are safely buckled into a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket at all times on or near the water.

Federal law requires that children under 13 years of age must wear a life jacket whenever a boat is underway, unless they are below deck or in an enclosed cabin. On some state waters this age requirement may vary, so parents are encouraged to check with their state boating agency regarding this requirement or to visit www.NASBLA.org for more information. But consider taking an extra measure of safety and know that life jackets can protect children in hazardous areas near the water as well as on it – around piers for example.

Kids' life jackets now have lots of eye appeal. Marine manufacturers have incorporated new designs and technologies into children's safety equipment, coming up with life jackets and life jacket-type swimwear in bright colors and cartoon prints.

Children's jackets are also constructed to provide extra protection. Many models for infants and toddlers have built-in head support that will turn the wearer face-up in the water, and most are built with extra buoyancy or other safety features just for children.

Height and weight can vary widely within age groups, so taking your child along for a life jacket fitting is very important. Just remember that swim aids and water wings are toys and do not meet state requirements.

Look for the U.S. Coast Guard label on the inside of the life jacket. This tells you the jacket has passed stringent tests for safety and durability. Check the label and match your child's weight to the range listed. Note that while some children in the 30-50 pound weight range who can swim may like the extra freedom of movement that a Type III life jacket or belt pack provides, most children in this weight range, especially those who can't swim, should wear a Type II life jacket.

But fit is where the rubber meets the road. Unlike shoes, a child's life jacket should fit snugly from day one. Parents should never make the mistake of buying a life jacket that a child will "grow into."

To check for a good fit, put the life jacket on your child and then pick him or her up by the shoulders of the jacket. If the jacket fits correctly, it will not ride up and the child's chin and ears will not slip through. A properly sized life jacket will stay in place even when a child is lifted into the air.

Once purchased, make sure your child feels comfortable wearing the life jacket and always test its effectiveness in the water before going boating. With the jacket on your child, conduct a "float test" in a secure, non-boating setting, such as a swimming pool, and teach your child how to float in a relaxed, face-up position. Trying it out under controlled conditions will also mean less anxiety for both of you should the child accidentally fall in the water while boating.

Set a good example by wearing your own life jacket at all times on or near the water and your child will come to consider always wearing a life jacket as the natural thing to do.

Can't afford life jackets? Or, need them for one use only? The BoatU.S Foundation's Life Jacket Loaner Program offers infant, toddler and children's life jackets at more than 350 locations nationwide. Many state and local boating organizations also have life jackets for children and adults available on loan. Individuals and families can check-out life jackets for a day or a weekend simply by completing a loan form. To find a loaner site in your area visit <http://www.BoatUS.com/foundation/ljlp> or check with your local marina.

The goal is to save lives. Children often don't understand danger and can be lost overboard in a heartbeat. Don't risk a lifetime of wishing you had buckled your child into a life jacket. Buckle up those kids! And have a safe day boating.

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The U.S. Coast Guard reminds all boaters to "Boat Responsibly!" For more tips on boating safety, visit www.USCGboating.org

(Sidebar: 263 words)

Dos and Don't for Safe Boating Children

DO make sure that each child wears a snug-fitting, U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket at all times on or near the water.

DON'T allow your children to sit on the deck, seatbacks, or gunwales while the boat is underway. If children are swimming near the boat, take the key out of the ignition.

DO take advantage of every opportunity to teach children to respect the waterways by obeying the rules of navigation and protecting the waterway environment.

DON'T allow children to trail their hands, arms, or legs in the water when docking or maneuvering around solid objects, such as a pier.

DO teach your children to help with chores on the boat by enrolling them in a basic Safe Boating course offered through the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, United States Power Squadrons® unit, or American Red Cross.

DON'T allow children to stand in high-speed boats. A quick drop of the throttle can result in serious head injuries; rapid acceleration can throw passengers over the transom and into the dangerous area behind the boat.

Most important, **DO** set a good example by taking a boating safety course yourself, always wearing your life jacket, never boating under the influence, and making sure your boat is properly equipped by signing up for an annual Vessel Safety Check offered by the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary or United States Power Squadrons®.

Photo 1. Life jackets for kids now come with special safety features and ample eye appeal.

Photo 2. Make sure the jacket is securely buckled, and test for a snug fit.

Photo 3. Underway, be sure kids remain seated, with hands and arms inside the boat.

