

Enjoying boating with children

We all enjoy being out on the water, and nothing is more enjoyable than sharing this experience with children, grandchildren and other youngsters who visit Marco Island. And the best way to ensure a great experience is to teach children how to be safe boaters!

First and foremost, we should all set the example of wearing our life jackets from the time we get on the dock and on the boat. It's very important that the life jacket is properly sized for young children or babies. Remember, it's mandatory that a child under six years old **must** wear a US Coast Guard approved life jacket at all times on any vessel less than 26 feet in length that is underway in Florida waters.

If you are underway in Federal or International waters, the law requires children under 13 years of age to wear a life jacket regardless of boat length. In the Gulf, Federal waters begin 9 miles offshore.

Once on the boat, let everyone know where all the safety equipment, such as fire extinguishers, flares, throwable cushions and the radio are located. Other safety reminders include:

- Keep seated while the boat is moving.
- The captain will let everyone know when he/she will be speeding up and slowing down
- Assist with departure or docking only when specifically asked to help.
- The captain will advise you when it's safe to get on or off the boat
- Keep arms and legs inside the boat, particularly around docks and pilings.
- Swim near the boat **ONLY** when the engines are off
- Don't throw any trash into the water

Show passengers what to do if someone goes overboard and instruct them in the use of throwable life preserver. Also, show them where the radio is located and how to use it.

And, remember that when on a boat, everyone is a lookout. Being a lookout is a great way to teach kids about navigation and ATONs, having them look for the next navigation point. They can also look for dolphins, manatees, crab pots, floating debris, changing weather, other boats & watercraft. Depending on the age of the children, they can learn about the charts, GPS and the radio. They might even be able to help pilot the boat!

If possible, go boating with two adults when you have children on board. That way while one of the adults is operating the boat, the other is ensuring the kids are safe.

Finally, remember that sun protection and proper hydration is particularly important with children. Bring along plenty of sunscreen, clothing, and water. Following these simple guidelines ensures that boating will be safe and enjoyable for everyone involved, as well as creates a new generation of safe boaters.

For more information, please go to marcoboatingclub.org

