Boating Safety Checklist

A one-page checklist before you leave the dock: a life jacket that fits for everyone, kids under 13, a float plan, the weather, cold water and no alcohol.

Letter page · For parents, adults, teens

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Wear a life jacket on every trip. In 2024, where life jacket use was known, 87% of people who drowned in boating incidents were not wearing one (U.S. Coast Guard).

Life jackets

- [ ] A U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket for each person, right for the activity.
- [ ] Each one fits: right weight on the label, buckled, snug, and doesn't ride up over the chin.
- [ ] Children under 13 wear theirs whenever the boat is moving (federal law; state laws may differ).
- [ ] Babies and young children: a collar for head support and a strap between the legs.
- [ ] Inflatable life jackets are for adults only, and not for weak swimmers or non-swimmers.

Before you leave the dock

- [ ] Check the weather and the water temperature. Dress for the water, not the air.
- [ ] Leave a float plan with someone reliable: where you're going and when you'll be back.
- [ ] No alcohol on board. It is the leading known factor in fatal boating incidents.
- [ ] The operator has taken a boating safety course.

What you can do today: try every life jacket on and do the fit check in how a life jacket should fit, or use Life jacket finder.

Sources

1. Recreational Boating Statistics 2024, U.S. Coast Guard. https://uscgboating.org/library/accident-statistics/Recreational-Boating-Statistics-2024.pdf
2. Life Jacket Wear / Wearing Your Life Jacket, U.S. Coast Guard Boating Safety. https://uscgboating.org/recreational-boaters/life-jacket-wear-wearing-your-life-jacket.php
3. Life Jackets Save Lives, Water Safety USA. https://www.watersafetyusa.org/life-jackets-save-lives.html
4. Float Plan, U.S. Coast Guard Boating Safety. https://uscgboating.org/recreational-boaters/floating-plan.php
5. Cold Water Hazards and Safety, National Weather Service. https://www.weather.gov/safety/coldwater

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