



Spring Prep for Kids

Get your kids ready for the best boating season ever!

Each new boating season brings the promise of something special: Good times ahead, the anticipation of familiar experiences and memories in the making. Boating season is finally here and your kids are probably just as excited as you are (if not more) to get back on the water.

When it comes to spring prep, let's face it, it's a bit of a chore for us adults. We're cleaning, painting hulls, charging batteries and stocking cabins — all the “work” that needs to happen ahead of the fun. But for our kids, it's all about getting back to the adventures of boating.

As a boater with two young girls (8 and 4), our countdown to the start of boating season often begins as early as January (yes, making it feel like an extra-long wait until spring). Usually sometime around February, our kids will start asking, “When are we going back to the boat?” The impatient questioning doesn't stop until the day we are driving to our marina and walking down the dock with a cart full of provisions.

It's no wonder that each year I strive to deliver the best possible experience for our family's summer on the boat.

Activity planning with kids

There's no time to waste for seasonal boaters who have a limited number of boating weeks and months. You want to maximize your time on the water, so now is the time to begin planning your itinerary to make the most of every week on the boat.

It's important to get your kids involved in the process of planning and ask them what activities they want to do on the boat. How do they want to spend weekends? What are the must-do boating trips of the summer? Who do they want to invite as guests? Getting them involved early on in the process will not only make it more fun, but it will help you maximize your family summer adventures.

Gearing up

Water safety and sun protection are my two primary concerns each summer. Balancing their desire for fun with your need for safety can be a tricky yet essential goal to achieve.

Before boating season is underway, check to see if your youth life jackets are still fitting your children properly. It may be time for them to move up into the next size bracket, like stepping up from the under-30 pound category to the 30-50 pound size range.

It's also smart to check life jackets for wear and tear. As kids get older, they move up in size less often and

their jackets tend to wear out faster. Sometimes, just a style change is in order. When my older daughter started getting fussy about wearing her nylon life jacket, we knew it was time to “up the cool factor” with a newer neoprene water sports vest.

As part of our water safety preparation for the summer, we also enroll our kids in swim lessons that conclude just as summer is starting. That way, their skills are advancing as the boating and swimming season gets underway. It also helps them make the most of the season, advancing even further in their swimming techniques throughout the summer.

Sun safety on the water is equally important. Not only can sunburns at an early age have damaging effects on your skin later on in life, but also painful sunburns will surely ruin your kid's day (and your day) on the water. Be sure to gear up with sun safe choices for the season, including a generous supply of sunscreen, UPF clothing and proper shade equipment on your boat.

Building life skills & experiences

We like to focus on the fun times that boating creates for our kids, but let's not forget about the valuable teaching and learning opportunities. From developing an appreciation for the environment, to building practical skills, the life experiences you'll enjoy with your kids are priceless.

As the season starts, it's a good time to acquaint children with boating basics, like navigation and listening to the captain — always with an emphasis on boat safety rules. Each year, your kids should also be ready to take on new age-appropriate responsibilities, which may include small tasks like helping clean the boat, to more significant tasks like assisting with the lines or operating a boat. As they build on these new skills, they'll also build up their confidence.

Your kids may not realize they are about to create lifelong memories with the family on the boat this summer — but they'll surely thank you later. ★



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