



tips for boating with children

Queenstown and its surrounds is a boating paradise in summer – the “ski season” is just beginning for us!

Boating is a fantastic way to get your family outside and enjoying the fine weather, and learning a few water skills at the same time. From the age of 1 our children have enjoyed being towed behind our boat on various water toys. Our 12 year old is able to waterski, and our 7 year old is very confident on the knee board. This year our 5 year old is very keen to try out the kneeboard too.

lifejackets

Children are required by law to wear life jackets which meet NZ Standard 5823:2005, in the correct size and type, at all times on a boat.

We recommend that adults wear their life jackets at all times, for two reasons – firstly to set an example, and secondly so that the adults are immediately ready and prepared to assist children in the case of an emergency.

Ensure that the life jacket is secure. A good tip is to tighten the life jacket so that it is firm and comfortable, and test it. Pick the child up holding only the shoulders of the life jacket. The jacket should not slide up above their ears. While a loose life jacket is unlikely to slide right off a child (especially if it has a crotch strap), it can be very uncomfortable in the water if not correctly fitted.

For first time life jacket wearers, a trip to the local swimming pool to test it out may be

helpful so that the child gets used to the feel of the life jacket in the water, and learns to roll onto their back to kick.

Remember that the lake is often much colder than the swimming pool. Practising treading water with a life jacket on is a good idea to ensure that children don't “panic and freeze” when they feel the cooler water.

Practising a family “huddle” in the lake is another way to ensure that children know what to do and how to keep warm should they end up in the lake by accident.

Children should sit down at all times when the boat is moving, and be taught to follow the skippers instruction immediately and without question at all times.

Life jackets with a “headrest” are NOT suitable for water skiers, and pose a risk of neck injury should the skier fall. Ensure that you pur-

chase an appropriate life jacket for your child when they begin to waterski.



new to boating?

There are a few basic rules to follow when enjoying the lakes with our children. Understanding the environment, knowing the rules, and having the correct equipment are crucial to ensuring that your boating experience is safe and enjoyable. We recommend that new boaters take a Coastguard Boating Education Course and ensure they are fully versed in the rules prior to boating and towing. Further information can be found at:

http://www.boatsafe.org.nz/pdfs/Safe_Boating_2008.pdf

towing

Children need to be confident treading water in their life jacket before beginning water sports. Life Jackets should be worn at all times when being towed by a boat. Wetsuits must be worn if towing at speed.

At least two adults are required when a skier or rider is being towed behind a boat – one to drive the boat and another to watch the skier/rider. Children do not make good “spotters” as they are easily distracted, and are not able to assist with the ski rope.

Be aware of ski access lane rules.

Teach your children basic hand signals – a hand up, palm open for Stop, Thumbs up for faster, Thumbs down for slower, an index

finger pointed upwards with arm circling for Turn Around.

If your child needs urgent help in the water, teach them to wave their arm in a high arc to give a clear signal.

Also ensure that your child is aware of driver hand signals so that they know when the boat is being turned and can get into position. When driving, give them extra time to register your signal and react – do not expect them to respond to instruction as quickly as an adult would.



sea biscuits and hotdogs

A child's first foray into the world of towing needs to be with an adult beside or behind them. A seabiscuit or hotdog is an excellent first toy.

Children will get wet riding in a seabiscuit, but may feel safer being “inside” something. It's also a lot of fun as the children get older and more confident. Children older than 5 years may enjoy this toy, with an adults company at first.

A hotdog sits high out of the water and the children do not get wet unless they want to. It seats up to three people at one time, and is ideal for slowly towing young children and keeping them dry. It's also a lot of fun at faster speeds for older children and adults – the challenge then is to stay on!!

kneeboarding

The next step for our children has been a kneeboard. This is a solo activity – the child needs to be confident alone in the water, able to extract themselves from the knee strap should they fall off, and able to calmly wait in the water

for the boat to return. An adult needs to assist the child at the beach for take-offs. Initially, an adult who is ready and willing to dive off the boat to assist a child in the water is very helpful and reassuring for the child.

water skiing

Water skiing can be difficult to start, even adults can require several attempts before being able to waterski.

Water skis for children are available, and come with a clip to keep the two skis together at the top. We have found the clip helpful in getting them “up” and balanced, but it needs to be removed once the child has learned to stand as they impede the water skiing once the child is upright.

If the child is not up and skiing within about 5 attempts, we recommend giving it a break until next time. The force of the pull from the boat tires the arms out very quickly, and after 5 attempts we have found that it's too difficult to hold onto the rope to be dragged out of the water.

Finally

Make sure that you have plenty of warm, dry clothing for your child to change into before you head for home. The wind can be very cold on wet bodies as you are travelling, and children cool down quickly.

Watersports can be exhausting - make sure you take plenty of high energy snacks to keep them going.

Please remember that even confident children need close supervision at all times both in and around the water.

Keep up those swimming lessons!

Boating is a lot of fun, but also a huge responsibility, so please do take the safety aspects seriously and enjoy being in the water with your family.

Anna Davy