
Small Watercraft Safety and Storage

Boats and boating are an important part of many kids' summer camp experiences. But they are also a potential hazard. It is critically important that all camps implement a robust system for restricting access to boats to organized programming only, and that there are multiple layers of protection in place to make sure boat and watercraft usage and programming is safe and appropriately monitored.

Below are some of the things to keep in mind:

Safe Boat Storage

- **Secure boats to a dock** with sturdy cables that can lock.
- Use a cable to lock and **secure boats to a boat rack**.
- **Use cage storage or a locked boat house** to store boats when not in use.
- Have a **procedure in place for accessing boats** which limits key usage to authorized staff, and makes sure equipment is secured in-between programming transitions also.
- Ensure that camp **supervisors are aware of and have approved all boat usage**.
- **Double check that boats are locked and secured often**, especially after each use.

Boating Precautions for Natural Bodies of Water

- **Develop procedures for safe boating** and use of the waterfront area, and review them with campers each time you begin programming.
- **Post effective signage and barriers** to restrict unsupervised activities.
- Equip all boats with an **emergency whistle**.
- [Know your state regulations](#) regarding camps and boating safety.
- Ensure that all **staff are instructed in basic small craft safety rules** and emergency procedures.
- Arrange for lifeguards to have verified and documented **water-rescue training specific to watercrafts**.
- **Inspect watercrafts and equipment on a regular basis**, and inspect all PFDs before each use. Report any needed repairs to a supervisor immediately.
- **Train all campers on safety rules** and give basic small craft instruction specific to the type of boat in use. Training should include: Properly fitting a PFD; self-rescue in case of capsize or swamping; boat handling; boarding, debarking; trimming; loading; and changing positions.

General Programming Rules for Natural Bodies of Water

- **Everyone must wear a US Coast Guard approved life jacket (PFD)** while on a boat in the water.
- Only **swim in designated areas** and away from boating.
- Implement a **buddy system**.
- Always make sure there is **at least one staff person on the shore**.
- **Never stand up in a canoe or kayak** and avoid weight shifts that may cause a boat to capsize.
- Know your groups' skill level and **adjust programming to meet the needs of the group**.
- **Scan for potential hazards** and changing weather conditions, and avoid weather or water conditions that could interfere with activities.
- Be on the lookout for and **adhere to signs and safety warnings**.
- **Set a reasonable pace** so everyone can stay together and recognize when campers are tired or are having difficulty keeping up and make necessary adjustments.
- **Designate a "sweep" boat** to bring up the rear and ensure that you don't lose stragglers.
- **Plan to use whistles or hand signals to communicate**, as wind and water sounds can affect hearing.
- **Drink plenty of water** to prevent dehydration.

Natural bodies of water should have some type of controlled access to docks, watercraft and equipment. Assuming that your campers know and will follow the rules is not enough to keep them safe, and the only way to limit unauthorized access to boats is to properly secure them with locks and physical barriers.