

# All Hands on Deck

Is it time to give your kids more duties on the boat?

It may seem like just yesterday your kids were learning to walk and get their “sea legs” on the boat for the first time, but they are growing up fast and may be ready to become a more active crewmember. From daily chores, like cleaning and tidying up, to bigger duties, like docking or driving the boat, there’s ample opportunity for kids to get more involved and take on added responsibilities.

Kids like to feel included and take on little jobs; it empowers them and gives them a sense of accomplishment. For parents, anytime you can make tasks or chores a learning opportunity, there’s an equal sense of accomplishment.

Even if your kids are younger, there are still plenty of ways they can help out around the boat and start learning about the many responsibilities that come with boat ownership.



## Choosing age appropriate duties

When delegating new duties on or around the boat, you obviously need to consider what your child is ready and able to tackle. As always, boat safety comes first; you’ll want to be sure any jobs involving your child are supervised until they are old enough or capable enough to handle it independently. This will ensure both your child’s safety and that proper care is given to the boat.

That being said, younger kids can start assisting with smaller things on the boat. As they get older, there are many tasks where kids can actually be a helpful addition to your crew. Here are a few ideas to get your kids involved on the boat, progressing from simpler tasks for younger kids to more skilled responsibilities for older children.

**Cleaning:** The task of cleaning a boat never seems to

end, so “start ‘em young.” You can hand your little ones a damp cloth to help wipe down the vinyl in the cockpit, while older kids may be able to help wash the boat’s exterior.

**Tidying up:** From stocking provisions in the cabin to pulling the dock cart to and from the boat, kids can help with many daily chores. Tidying up is needed while carrying gear onto a boat, stowing gear before or after a cruise, and packing up to go home. Assigning ongoing responsibilities will give kids a sense of ownership with daily chores or duties.

**Assisting:** Every captain needs a good first mate — or a first mate in training. Assistance jobs can be tasks like fetching gear for the captain, prepping or preparing meals on-board, being a watersports spotter or even being a helpful hand during maintenance work.

**Handling lines:** The handling of boat lines may start with learning to tie up loose lines in the cockpit and progress to bigger tasks like helping to dock and tie off the boat.

**Navigating:** The companion seat next to the helm is a great spot to learn the rules of the water while assisting with navigation. Your little one could be the look-out for buoys or channel markers and help keep an eye on charts. Get them even more involved by helping to decide on an itinerary or chart a course ahead of a trip.

**Driving:** With proper supervision and boater education courses, older kids can start driving a boat (or at least co-captaining). Be sure to check with the specific rules in your state as the age restrictions to drive a boat or personal watercraft unsupervised can vary.

## Teachable boating moments

Going to the boat is about more than just having a fun day out on the water — it’s learning about what it takes to own, care for and operate a boat. These moments on-board will create a lifetime of knowledge.

An early sense of responsibility or duty will only increase the connection your child has with boating. Usually a hands-on activity showing a proper technique (or showing how things can go wrong) is where kids learn best.

This season, our 10-year-old is eager to help with the lines while docking — a task we’ll likely do together for the next few years until we are satisfied she can handle it safely. Meanwhile, our 6-year-old is mommy’s little helper stocking the refrigerator with water bottles and enjoys being daddy’s cruising buddy at the helm.

Talk to your kids about what new responsibilities they want to take on this boating season. Their eagerness to learn coupled with their enthusiasm for boating might make it the perfect time for them to lend a hand. ★



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