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Officials advise how to protect kids while boating



By Renee Chmiel, News 8 Reporter (<http://wtnh.com/author/wtnhreneechmiel/>)

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(WTNH)—News 8 is taking a closer look at Connecticut's boating laws and safety recommendations after two 14-year-old boys went missing off the coast of Florida.

State officials say simplest thing you can do to protect your kids out on the water is to make sure they're wearing life jackets. The label on the back of the jacket will tell you what size is best for your child. If your child is under age 13, wearing a life jacket is the law. However, officials recommend that everyone wear them and that parents set an example.

“When you put them on they should be snug. They shouldn’t be loose and you shouldn’t be able to raise the life jacket more than an inch or two off the shoulders,” said Mark Chanski, a boating resource technician for the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

When it comes to driving boats, kids under age 12 can’t go out by themselves. Older kids can as long as they have a boating certificate, which adults need too. Certification courses are aimed at giving kids and their parents a respect for the water. It’s up to parents to decide what kind of boat kids can drive and how far they can go.

“Understand what your child is capable of doing out there and how much you want him out on that water without adult supervision, where you want him to be, how far out you want him to go,” said Stephen Perrone, who teaches the certification courses.

But even when folks follow the rules accidents can happen. A 16-year-old girl was killed by a boat’s propeller last summer in Greenwich. She and her friends had boating certificates. Chanski says kids and adults should make a plan before they go out on the water, just in case something goes wrong.

“You need to tell somebody where you’re going, what boat you’re taking, when you’ll be back. All those things can make a big difference if somebody’s missing, doesn’t come home,” said Chanski.

Kids need to be at least 16 years old to drive jet skis by themselves.

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