



RYA Racing Safety Guidance Notes

Defining the role of the coach



Revised August 2016

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Section 1 - Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the RYA Safety Guideline

As Racing Coach (RCL2 or RCL3) you are responsible for the delivery and organisation of coaching, including the **safety of all participants**. This guide has been prepared to help you to fully understand your responsibilities in the safety area.

As coaches we operate in an inherently dangerous environment, however we can all identify times when people have been excessively complacent when assessing the risks and not taking adequate safety precautions to minimise these risks. This document is intended to promote thought and action from coaches, and provide a useful reference alongside the Checklist. Ultimately as Coaches we are the individuals primarily responsible for the safety of the group with which we are operating.

This document is not intended to be the definitive guide on Safety Policy regarding the delivery of coaching or race training. Its purpose is to provide practical guidance as to what might be considered reasonable. Also it provides some useful resources to enable you to act with more confidence and assurance, and to ensure you have taken adequate precautions.

Attached is a form entitled “**Coach Safety Checklist**”, the document is intended to be laminated, the details filled in (in chinagraph pencil) and taken afloat as an information point. We would expect any responsible Coach to have identified, and gathered any relevant points of information from the sheet. Also we would expect coaches to provide and take the relevant equipment afloat with them when delivering an on the water coaching session.

This will ensure you operate self-sufficiently and have the relevant equipment to deal responsibly and practically with any situation which may reasonably be expected to arise. It is easy for confusion to arise in difficult circumstances. By gathering basic information and doing some key planning with regard to safety it should be possible to maintain control of the situation.

The document draws upon the practical experience and common practices from within the Sailing Coaching community.

1.2 Scope

They apply solely to the activities that come under the direct responsibility of the RYA within in its Junior, Youth, Podium Potential (*collectively known as the Pathway Programmes*) and Podium Sailing Programmes.

Section 2 – Legal Responsibilities

2.1 Claims for negligence

If a person is injured, they may take legal action and recover damages from any person

whose negligence caused, or contributed to, the injury.

To prove negligence, the injured party must show that the Defendant:

1. owed him/her a duty of care;
2. was in breach of that duty; and
3. that the injury arose as a result of that breach.

Negligence can be described as either:

1. Doing an act which a reasonable person would not have done in the circumstances, or
2. Failing to do something which a reasonable person would have done.

Every case before the courts will depend upon its precise facts, and there have been no recorded findings of negligence against any coach or official in the organising of any sailing events.

2.1 Coach responsibilities

As an Racing Coach, you are responsible for the **safety of all participants** within your care. This is known as a duty of care which states that you must take reasonable care to avoid acts or omissions which you could reasonably foresee which would be likely to injure your sailor”.

These precautions need to take account of factors such as:

- Weather and wind
- Ratios of safety boats to sailing boats
- Types of boat sailed
- Rescue facilities, equipment, first aid
- Ability, qualifications and training of rescue crews
- Students sailing and swimming ability, gender and age
- Time available
- Facilities available
- Insurance policies with the club, sailor’s boats and powerboats
- Medical conditions of the students/ coach/helpers
- Communications such as radios
- Other club activities
- Hazards associated with sailing at that club
- Currents, tide and tidal flow

2.1.1 Loco Parentus

Loco parentus means acting as a parent and indicates a higher level of duty of care when dealing with sailors/assistants under the age of 18. The important advice is that you need to take the precautions that a reasonable parent would take to look after their child.

The following general guidelines should assist in establishing the right level of supervision and safety rules.

Children below the age of 11 - Inexperienced sailors

Where this age group is concerned, the duty of care is at its highest particularly where the parents or guardians are not in immediate attendance (or in the case where the parents or guardians are themselves inexperienced). Constant supervision is appropriate, and particular care must be shown in not exposing the child to danger. This would apply equally whether afloat, ashore, or at the water's edge. Volunteers are effectively *in loco parentis* and will be expected to show the same level of care, as would reasonably careful and knowledgeable parents in the same circumstances.

Children below the age of 11 - Experienced sailors

For this group the same principles as to supervision will apply, except that the children may be expected to cope with more difficult weather conditions. Of course a balance must be struck between over-protectiveness and permitting children to take foolhardy risks. It is unlikely to be acceptable for a club or official to claim that the child willingly accepted the risk.

Children 11-13 - Inexperienced sailors

The same principles will apply as for younger children while afloat, although a lower level of supervision would be expected while ashore or at the water's edge.

Children 11 - 13 - Experienced sailors

Children in this age group will vary considerably in having sufficient maturity to make decisions about risk taking particularly when peer pressure is involved. While a degree of supervision is still expected, they can be reasonably expected to be self-reliant both afloat and ashore. However there will still be a tendency among some to under estimate the risks involved. Consideration should also be given as to whether a child is taking risks because of peer pressure.

Young people 14 - 18 - Inexperienced sailors

The same principles will apply as for younger sailors while afloat, although a very much lower level of supervision would be expected while ashore or at the water's edge.

Young people 14 - 18 - Experienced sailors

Once over the age of 14, depending on the mental maturity of the individual, young people can be expected to make sensible decisions about their exposure to risk. By the age of 16 or so they would be equated by the courts to adults, and special considerations as to the supervision of young persons would be unlikely to apply. It should be noted however that the age of legal majority is 18, so any contractual documents, including exclusion of liability clauses, would probably be of no effect in law and should not be relied upon.

Section 3 — Before Going Afloat

3.1 Ability Assessment

Before going afloat for the session it is important that in our own minds we attempt to assess the standard of the group with which we intend to work. If you are engaged in squad based activity do not assume the individuals will all be of the same ability which you encountered last time you did similar coaching.

If operating with an unfamiliar squad you may find it useful to observe the way the group handle their dinghies ashore as this often gives valuable insights into the ability of the group. Try to consider whether the group has been coached before and whether they will be familiar with general practices and expectations which may seem common to you. If in doubt reinforce the points at the Briefing.

3.2 Obtain Weather Forecast

Obtain a reliable weather forecast, one of the most reliable available tends to be from the RYA Website at <http://www.rya.org.uk>

Think about the implications of the weather forecast in relation to the framework you will be operating in. What does it mean in terms of the venue you are at? Corroborate the forecast with what you are seeing on location. Is everything happening as forecast? Quicker? Slower?

Consider the implications of the forecast in relation to how you structure the session. If the forecast is foul you may choose to split the group by ability and proximity to the shore, or perhaps only take half afloat.

Evaluate the most appropriate things to work on and the exercises to choose, given the conditions and the level of group control you need to employ for them. For example, small group rabbits become notoriously spread out in considerable breeze.

Ensure you brief the group on actions to take appropriate to the forecast. For example, to go ashore, or possibly to invert on your instruction, if lightning is forecast.

3.3 Signs and Signals Whilst Afloat

When briefing the group it is important to highlight your authority and responsibility for the group and subsequently the need for group members to act appropriately on your instructions. This should be done even if the necessity to do so is not immediately apparent to them.

It is important to establish how instructions will be given, bear in mind it will be extremely difficult to talk/ shout if the conditions turn foul or you are dealing with something else. Establish suitable hand and sound signals for common instructions, for example, going ashore.

3.4 Brief Host, Safety Boat Crews and House Parent Ashore

Before going afloat, and in most cases prior to the weekend, it is vital to discuss the Safety matters with the hosts of your training. This discussion should enable you to establish areas of responsibility with regard to safety precautions and actions afloat. It should also help you to ascertain what special precautions or procedures need to be carried out specific to the risks or circumstances at that venue. This should enable

you to establish local rules and legal requirements with regard to hazards at that venue. You should get someone ashore to contact you if someone intends to join the session late etc.

3.5 Contact Relevant Authorities

For many venues it is prudent, and courteous to call the local Coastguard (or Harbourmaster) before the session and alert them to your plans if the host venue has informed you that it is necessary to do so. For some it is compulsory, particularly in working harbours or ports (eg. Plymouth). You will need to tell them how many boats will be going afloat. During this interaction you can be expected to give them your contact details and it's likely that they will expect you to call them when you return ashore. Having established yourself as a point of contact this will mean they will contact you if any problems arise.

3.6 Leave Contact Details

You may feel it worthwhile to leave your mobile telephone number with people ashore (sailing club, parents etc) as this will enable them to call you should they need to. For coaches operating within the RYA Zone, Junior and Youth Programme it is essential to delegate a parent for the day who will be on or around the beach and able to receive a sailor, or boat requiring attention. Do not underestimate how much people like to feel involved in the session even in some small way, they are keen to feel they have a role or purpose within the scheme.

It may be suitable at times to brief the group and the parents that for a number of reasons you may choose to go ashore somewhere other than the shore you left from should the weather turn foul, or the need arise.

Briefing the relevant people on action to be taken in certain situations will make the session more structured and ultimately safer. Furthermore it will be obvious to the parents that you are conducting the training in a responsible and safe manner.

3.7 Review Medical Information

It is a good idea to familiarise yourself with the medical details of the group before you go afloat (or ideally prior to the weekend). This will enable you to find out about any medical conditions you do not understand. If you have any queries contact Dr. David Gorrod, RYA Medical Officer well in advance on 07768 293943 or at david.gorrod@btinternet.com. Please note that many of the sailors in the Youth program at present are asthmatic and you will need to establish who if anyone is going to carry their inhaler where appropriate. There is a copy of a medical questionnaire that you can use in Appendix B.

Section 4 – Whilst Afloat

4.1 Support Boats first afloat and last ashore

It may seem common sense, but there are a catalogue of examples where safety issues have arisen as a result of boats being on the water unattended at training sessions. It is important for us to recognise that potentially the times when sailors are most vulnerable is when sailing to and from the training area. At these times boats are likely to be most spread out, least supported, sailors concentrating the least, and on the way in it is when the sailors are most tired. However it is often the time they are left alone whilst a course is set. Try to occupy the group at these key times and maximise the benefit of the session afloat.

If a course needs to be set or recovered it is good practice at squad based sessions for one coach to go and lay the course and the other coach to work with the group.

Good exercises to keep the group together and busy at this time are “follow my leader”, “large group rabbit starts”, and tacking/ gybing on the whistle to name but a few.

Agree which is going to be the last support boat to come ashore and use this boat to shepherd the fleet in, don't go ashore until all the boats have been safely recovered.

4.2 Count Boats ashore

Check the boats ashore from the figure you have recorded on your checklist to avoid any uncertainty with regard to accounting for the safe return of all the boats. Aim to nominate a parent for this task, in some circumstances it may be worth instigating a sign in and out system if this is not possible.

4.3 Keep your eye on the Weather

At sea we are all aware that the conditions can deteriorate rapidly. As coaches we should be constantly vigilant to our surroundings and the prevalent conditions. Do not assume the weather forecast will show that the weather will become unfavourable. An example of the weather causing major problems was the infamous Dart 18 Nationals at Weymouth where the forecast was nasty but not exceptional. Most squalls can be pre-empted by keeping a good look out to windward. In the event of conditions deteriorating the decision to go ashore needs to be taken early. Again, try to exercise the boats as they sail in since this will maintain group control and avoid the ‘starburst effect’. The Starburst effect is where the boats quickly become very spread out over the sailing area.

4.4 Keep your eye on the Group

It is prudent to regularly count up the boats to check they are all accounted for. Even having been briefed to the contrary, young sailors are often been known to sail in without announcing their intention to do so for a number of reasons (breakage, illness, fatigue etc.).

Even when working intensively with one particular boat or group of boats a Coach has a responsibility to maintain some attention to the whole groups activities etc.

Try to keep all the boats within a distance whereby should an emergency arise you can get there within a reasonable time frame.

4.5 Attend to Capsized Boats

The degree of attention required depends upon the age of the group you are working with. At Junior level some of the sailors may require the confidence of hearing a RIB approach even if they don't require assistance. Don't underestimate the effect your presence and/or the lack of it can have on the outlook and behaviour of a young sailor.

At other levels it may not be necessary to be quite so attentive, though it is good practice to aim to get in a position where you can see the sailor quickly if there is no immediate signs of the boat being righted (to observe if they are OK and preparing to do so).

4.6 Look out for Hazards

At many of the venues you coach at you will be required to share the venue with other water users. Do not assume that a hazard may only come from the weather or capsizing. You may also need to watch out for other water users such as ferries, tankers, powerboats, jet skiers and windsurfers.

Section 5 – Emergencies

5.1 Introduction

As it is impossible to predict the exact nature of an emergency and it is therefore impractical to give thorough advice for every eventuality. However if the planning process has been done effectively you should know the solution or negating action instantly.

Key things are to make sure all the relevant people are kept informed of what has, or is occurring. These may be parents, beach master's, RYA representatives, Club personnel, emergency services etc.

Should any serious incident occur the relevant people from the RYA should be made aware as soon as possible. Please note that there is a policy and system in place within the RYA for such eventualities and this should be discussed with the RYA if you are in any doubt of what to do.

5.2 Keeping the group together

If the emergency is a medical one it is important the rest of the group be managed whilst it is sorted out. These issues have a habit of mushrooming as one incident leads to another as soon as the group is poorly supervised when the coaches attention is diverted. It is often appropriate to get one boat to organise an appropriate exercise like Rabbits in order to keep the group together rather than risk the group spreading out by sending them in.

5.3 Getting people out of danger

By continually assessing the risks involved and the best way to negate them, it should be possible to make a quick decision as to the best way to get sailors out of harm whether by taking the sailors off the boats or similar.

Section 6 – Good Practice

6.1 Introduction

As a responsible Coach you should aim to equip yourself with many of the items on the **RYA Safety Checklist** as personal items. Most Coaches find it necessary to have a large dry bag which they can take afloat that contains the following items:

Spare Kill Cord*	First Aid kit including Survival* Blanket (not space blanket)
Serrated Knife or heavy duty scissors*	Duck tape
Whistle*	Tool Kit/ repair kit /Wire cutters
Buoyancy aid or life jacket*	Spare clothing e.g. Hat, waterproof top
VHF Radio	Compass, wind indicator, tide sticks, anemometer, burgee
Mobile Phone*	Water proof container for labelled inhalers
Medical Info Summary*	Flares (if at sea)
Emergency Contact Summary*	Wet Notes or Dictaphone*

*- Essential items

Some of these items may be included in the coach boat equipment. Full coaching list and supplier in Appendix A

6.2 Keep Qualifications Up to Date

It is a requirement for any Racing Coach to hold an valid date first aid certificate and at least a level 2 powerboat qualification.

The RYA stipulation is that the First Aid course should be at least 6 hours long and include the treatment of Hypothermia. The first aid course normally needs to be retaken every three years.

6.3 Consider Further Qualifications

You will find it beneficial to gain further qualifications. In particular, we would recommend that you gain your Safety Boat Qualification which teaches you how to deal with all the common rescue situations which can arise. For international events it is essential that you hold an International Certificate of Competency. This can be obtained at the same time as Level 2 with a coastal endorsement.

Any coach using a VHF radio should hold a VHF users license (SCR), especially if working abroad. All details of courses and centre that run them are listed on the RYA website: <http://www.rya.org.uk/training/courses.asp>

6.4 Don't Take Unnecessary Risks

Be aware of the vulnerability of our surroundings and how quickly a situation can become unsafe. From time to time we recommend that you consider your responsibility with regard to liability and negligence. This may at times reinforce your decision to stay ashore. Do not assume time spent ashore is a waste. A well planned theory session is a fundamental part of a professionally delivered coaching programme. Have your talks planned prior to the weekend in case the situation arises.

6.5 Consider Having Your Own Insurance

If you are doing a large amount of coaching outside of the RYA Racing Programmes, it is prudent for you to take out additional insurance cover.

When working at an RYA affiliated club the majority of race training is covered by the club's insurance. However a visiting coach working with the club may not be able to check the insurance details and therefore is advised to contact the RYA for a coaching indemnity policy. The cheapest and most specific policy for coaches.

Any coaches working abroad should examine the policy offered by Sport Coach UK <http://www.sportscoachuk.org>. It will require you to join but it is the cheapest and most comprehensive on the market. You will require insurance for any rib you are using to cover all potential issues.

Note: you are obviously covered if engaged in RYA activity operating from a RYA affiliated club.

6.6 Know The Framework

Many of the issues mentioned above with regard to Risk and Child Protection are explained on the following web site:

<http://www.rya.org.uk/racing/youthjunior/information/Pages/Policies.aspx> . It is very important to know the framework and then you can decide how best to protect yourselves and your sailors from any incidents.

Section 7 – Further Information

RYA Youth and Junior Policies:

<http://www.rya.org.uk/racing/youthjunior/information/Pages/Policies.aspx>

RYA website legal section:

www.rya.org.uk/legal/clubadvice.asp?content/D=1019492

Appendix A - Safety Check list

Personal Kit		Coach Boat Kit	
Serrated Knife or heavy duty scissors*		Paddles or oars	
Whistle*		Bucket or bailer	
Buoyancy aid or Life Jacket*		Bridle secured to towing eyes	
VHF Handheld Radio*		Towline	
Mobile Phone*		Spare starting cord and minimal tool kit	
Medical Info Summary*			
Emergency Contact Summary*		Chain and warp as appropriate to area	
Compass, wind indicator, tide sticks, anemometer, burgee		Bow anchor sufficient for safety boat and any towed craft	
First Aid kit including Survival* Blanket (not space blanket)			
Spare clothing or food e.g. Hat, waterproof top		Distress flares 2 orange smoke and 2 pinpoint red, or 2 day/night flares	
Tool Kit, repair kit, wire cutters, duck tape		Kill cords must be fully functional and must be fitted at all times	
Wet notes or Dictaphone*		Spare Kill Cord	
Water proof container for labelled inhalers		Fire extinguisher	

*- Essential kit

Appendix B - Confidential Medical Consent Form

To be filled in by candidates attending session/course

Name.....
Course/venue..... Date(s).....

Date of birth..... Age..... Male Female

Home address.....
.....
Post Code.....

Telephone Number (Home).....
(Work).....(Mob).....

Name and address of next of kin (to be contacted only in the case of an emergency)

.....
.....
.....

Telephone number of next of kin:
Home.....Work.....Mob.....

Have you had any of the following:

Asthma or bronchitis	YES/NO
Heart condition	YES/NO
Fits, fainting or blackouts	YES/NO
Severe headaches	YES/NO
Diabetes	YES/NO
Allergies to any known medicine	YES/NO
Any other allergies, e.g. material, food	YES/NO
Other illnesses or disability	YES/NO
Travel sickness	YES/NO
Regular medication	YES/NO

Are you receiving any medication for any condition? YES/NO

Are you suffering from any injury? YES/NO

If the answer to any of these questions is YES please give details:

It is your responsibility to make known any potential medical conditions that may affect your own personal safety during the activities associated with the course/event.

Declaration

I consider myself physically fit to take part in the course and can swim 50 metres in light clothing with a buoyancy aid.

Signed..... Date.....

Appendix C - RYA INCIDENT REPORT

Date of incident:	
Squad/Class:	
Venue:	
Weather conditions (if relevant):	
RYA Coach in charge:	
Appointed House Parent(s):	
Individual(s) involved:	
Nature of the incident:	
Witnesses:	
Action taken:	
Name of RYA Manager informed:	
Parent informed?	

Appendix D- Risk Assessment Form

Key Categories	Hazard	Risk Level High/ Med/ Low	Who Does it affect?	How can it be controlled/ avoided?
Ashore				
On The Water				
Using a power boat				