

Basic Paddle & Safety Talk

When giving a paddle/safety talk its important to use a proper tone. A good tip is to start off on a lighter note (like rule #1-look good) and set a more collected tone during the more serious topics. Asking for any questions and ending on a lighter note by reminding the group they're out to have fun is a nice way to finish off your safety talk.

- **Rule #1-Look Good**
Never break Rule #1
- **Paddling & T-Grip Safety**
Always keep your top hand on the T-Grip of the paddle. When T-Grips are exposed, they can be hazardous to others in the raft. Inform passengers of how to properly paddle. Paddle lingo varies between captains.
- **High-Siding**
If the boat encounters an obstacle in the river, like a rock, the boat may be pushed up onto the rock. The 'low-side' of the boat will get dragged deeper into the water, while the 'high-side' will continue to push higher up on the obstacle. The goal of a successful 'highside' is to transfer all the weight (bodies) in the boat to the high tube of the boat. The weight should push the boat back down to a flat position, and the crew can continue to float.
- **Staying in the Boat**
You always want to try and stay in the boat. When paddling, feet can be wedged under thwarts and in foot-cones. When riding as a passenger on an oar boat, find a secure place to wedge in with some good hand-holds. Don't entrap yourself in the boat, be able to release if necessary.
- **If you end up in the water..**
If you find yourself in the water, it's important to remain calm. Its loud down in the water so take a breath and look around. If you find yourself under the raft, push out from under it in one consistent direction.
- **Swimming: Whitewater Swim position VS. Aggressive Swim Position**
Whitewater Swim Position: Rely on your PFD to Float. Head facing up out of the water, feet pointed downriver to act as a bumper for rocks and other obstacles, arms out to the sides to help keep pointed down river. Aggressive Swim Position: Flip over onto stomach and swim hand over hand in the direction you wish to go.
- **Don't Stand Up in the River! (Foot-Entrapment)**
Instinct is to try and stand up when you fall out of the boat, DON'T DO THIS. If you stand up in moving water, your foot will act as a hook and can become lodged. Rely on your PFD to float and keep your legs up floating on the surface. **DON'T STAND UP IN THE RIVER!**
- **Reach-Row-Throw-Go**

First reach for the swimmer with your hand. Next, reach with the T-Grip of your paddle. If the swimmer is still out-of-reach use your throw bag, all the while trying to move the boat closer to the swimmer. Finally GO, referring to a rescue swim as a last resort that should only be executed with proper safety & support with the use of a Type 5 rescue PFD.

- **Throw-Bagging**

Introducing rope to the water is never ideal and can be dangerous. Use throw-bags as a later resort. Make sure the swimmer grabs the rope and not the bag and does not wrap the rope around themselves or extremities.

- **Strainers**

A strainer is anything in the river that water passes through, but a solid object may not. If you're swimming and encounter a strainer, transition into the aggressive swim position and swim away from the strainer. If you can't avoid the strainer, swim aggressively towards it and pull yourself up on top of the strainer as high as you can to clear over the strainer. The last resort if stuck on a strainer is to push under it.

- **Getting Back in the Boat**

The swimmer faces towards the boat. Someone in the boat braces their legs against the tube, grabs the swimmer by the lapels of their PFD and falls back into the boat, pulling the swimmer on top of them. Use your body weight and not arm strength.

- **Blow the Whistle**

One whistle blast to call attention. Three loud consecutive blasts to signal a swimmer or emergency.

- **Hand Signals**

Tapping on the head is a question and answer signal. 'Are you OK?' if the response is a tap on the head, then the answer 'Yes I'm OK.' If there is no response, its time to go into rescue mode.

Spinning your hand in a circle, then pointing to river left or right is the signal for eddy-out.

- **Pointing Positive**

Everyone on the river will always point in a positive direction or the direction you 'should' go. Never point to an obstacle that boaters or swimmers should avoid, it will create confusion. Its important to use exaggerated hand gestures when signaling a swimmer to swim towards the shore, or back to the boat.

***Remember, this is just a basic paddle talk. Taking a Swiftwater Rescue course is the best way to prepare yourself for time on the river.**