



Chose the right lifejacket for you child

Lifejackets are the best line of defence to stop drowning when your child is on, near or in water. They come in a range of sizes from three months through to five-year olds and are an important investment in their wellbeing and safety.

They cost a very reasonable \$40 to \$100 depending on size, design and make; and they can be purchased from big chain stores through to specialty boating outlets as well as online.

Lifejackets are specifically designed for infants and toddlers and are made from moulded buoyancy and tough neoprene. They hold your child secure with a non-slip fastening system and a crotch strap that holds the jacket tightly to the body and stops it sliding up over your child's head when they are in water.

Cheaper lifejackets that are available a major chain stores are ok, but some don't have the smallest size such as the under 3 year olds, and they often don't have a crotch strap which is crucial for holding the child in the jacket.

One online New Zealand website has a child's extra small (10 to 15kgs), small (15 to 25kgs); medium (25 to 40kgs), adult small (40 to 50kg) and adult medium (50 to 60 kgs.). Priced around \$50 they are a good investment.

We also found on special on a lifejacket in sizes child extra small, child small and child medium for \$40 so there are good alternatives out there you just have to Google!

Always buy a jacket that fits the child now. Do not be tempted to get a bigger size that your child 'will grow into' – a snug fitting jacket is crucial to their safety. If you can place three fingers between the shoulder and the lifejacket it is too big.

If you buy a tighter-fitting jacket you can always give it away as your child grows, making sure friends and whanau are safe out on the water.

All lifejackets must meet NZ Safety Standards.

The wearing of lifejackets on boats

Maritime Law says that people on vessels under six metres are to wear lifejacket unless the skipper decides it is safe to remove them. It means a skipper will be held personally accountable and could face charges should something go wrong.

However, it is best advice and practice to wear a lifejacket in any weather conditions and whichever kind of boat you are on.

In an emergency there is no time to grab a lifejacket unless it is really close at hand and it is extremely difficult, near on impossible, to put a lifejacket on once you are in water.

Crotch straps are recommended as they anchor the lifejacket to your body and stop it from slipping up over your head.

The skipper of the boat is responsible for carrying correctly sized lifejackets for each person on board. It is a legal requirement that applies to all boats, including tenders and larger boats.

It is their responsibility to ensure that lifejackets are worn in situations of heightened risk, in rough water, during an emergency and if there are non-swimmers that are aboard.

Some local council by laws go further than the minimum legal requirements. Check with your local council here: https://www.maritimenz.govt.nz/recreational/safety/regional-safety.asp#find_your_region

Yachting

Safety harnesses can be worn on bigger yachts and boats. These can be purchased from boating stores and are worn with a rope leading back to a central place in the stern of the boat. This means you can adjust how far the child can walk around the decking.

Another idea is to fence the yacht's stanchion (the back of the boat). It can be made from closely spaced chicken wire or other suitable material such as canvas. This will give you a smaller area in which to contain the child. Remember though, you must make sure that the child cannot climb any fence that you put on your boat.