

## FOR YOUR SAFETY

### Safety Rules for All Paddlers, but Especially Rookies and Those of Us Returning After an Absence.

1. You, the paddler, know your body better than any coach or sweep. You must listen to your body, and follow what it tells you. If it says, you are tired, STOP! Center your paddle, take a break for a few strokes or minutes depending on what you need. Breathe. And join in later. Your endurance will improve. DO NOT HURT YOURSELF! The coach or the sweep cannot see inside you. You must let them know, and they will help you modify your workout.
2. There is no shame in saying “I can’t do it today.” Center your paddle and join in later. Is this a repeat of Rule #1? Yes! It’s that important.
3. Shh! We don’t like to admit it, but this is a club of mostly older people. Our safety rules are meant to keep us from falling, and to prevent injury. When younger people fall in a dragon boat, they bounce! When 60-somethings fall in a dragon boat, they break. So Rule #3 is NO FALLING.
4. All paddlers must wear a working Personal Flotation Device (PFD) at all times. **NO EXCEPTIONS!** Advice about PFDs is posted on our website.
5. All paddlers should have a Road ID (or similar waterproof identification) on their person at all times.
6. There must be one cell phone on the boat at all times, easily reachable in case of an emergency.
7. Place car keys in the key bag, to be stowed onboard or in the bucket during a paddle. Seat 2 is in charge of stowing and retrieving the key bag. Phones are best left in the car, but if you must have your phone on you, be sure it is in a waterproof pouch.
8. Bring a water bottle or two to all paddles. Water is usually available in the dock box.
9. Wear sunscreen. Shade is rare out on the water. All paddlers must wear workout clothes appropriate for the weather, and non-skid shoes that don’t mind getting wet. No flip-flops.
10. For extremely hot weather, bring a hat, neckerchief to wet and put around your neck, and maybe a spray bottle to wet yourself down. Consider getting wet at the beach before practice.
11. For cold weather in the spring, wear layers and a warm hat that can be shed as we warm up.

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## RULES FOR LOADING THE BOAT

**Loading and unloading the boat is probably the most dangerous part of practice, but we mitigate the dangers by being careful AND following the established safety protocol.**

**The boat is loaded from front to back, therefore, seat 1 will be at the front of the line.**

- **The SWEEP is in charge of loading the boat.**
- Once your seat is assigned stand with your seat mate on the dock far enough back that you are not blocking the coaches or sweep.
- Someone from seat 5 can sit on the dock and hold the boat steady for loading.
- Come forward when called by the sweep.
- Load only one person at a time.
- The first paddler, usually the port side paddler, hands their gear to their seat mate, and holds the sweep's forearm to be guided into the boat.
- Try your best to step to the middle of the seat where the post is supporting the seat.
- Step down carefully, being aware of the slope of the boat and any wet spots.
- Some paddlers prefer to get in the boat by sitting down on the dock and sliding in. Just remember, one paddler at a time.
- Take your gear from your seat mate and hold your seat mate's gear so (s)he can get in the boat.
- Keep talking to a minimum, so everyone can hear the sweep's commands.
- Be ready to push or pull the ends of the boat in or out to accommodate our smaller paddlers.
- Once the boat is loaded and balanced, the sweep will call for a count-off.
  - Paddlers will count off so everyone on board knows exactly how many persons are in the boat in case of capsiz.
  - All paddlers are asked to make a note of their "partner." This is usually your seat mate, but it could be a paddler in front or behind you.
  - Remember your seat number! See *Capsize Procedures* for more information.

## RULES FOR UNLOADING THE BOAT

- **The SWEEP is the first person off the boat.**
- The sweep goes to seat 1 (or whichever seat (s)he chooses).
- The seat mate holds the gear for whoever is getting out of the boat.
- Grab the sweep's forearm and step out carefully. **NEVER** get out of the boat without at least one hand on somebody or something (such as a pole) firmly attached to the dock.
- The seat mate then hands all equipment to you so they may exit the boat.
- The boat is buoyant and may shift without warning.
- Leave the dock immediately, and wait in the parking lot for any closing discussion.

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## GENERALLY

- Our boats are stable, but they have limits. To reduce the risk of capsize, do not lean over the side of the boat without warning your seat mate to watch and be prepared to lean the other way.
- Do not stand in the boat...even if there are spiders!
  - If you need to stand, notify the sweep and they will make the appropriate command to “brace” the boat.
- If a paddler must change seats, or move in the boat, the sweep will call “Brace the boat!” Once the paddles have spread out the weight of the boat, one can walk between the paddlers by holding on to their shoulders and carefully stepping over each seat. To change sides (port<>starboard), one seat mate stands up and leans over the paddlers in front. The other slides over quickly.

## IN CASE OF CAPSIZE...

Capsizes are rare, but they do happen. We have never capsized here, however, we have witnessed capsizes at numerous festivals. Preventing a capsize by being constantly aware of the conditions, and adjusting your weight to counterbalance any deviations is the best policy. Even so, we can't predict all circumstances. Knowing what to do in the case of capsize is the best way to protect yourself and your club mates from injury.

- If you have a manual inflatable PFD, pull the cord immediately.
- Stay close to the boat. This is true for swimmers and non-swimmers alike.
  - The boat will not sink.
  - Keep talking to a minimum until we have established that all paddlers are present.
- Get out from under the boat first. The first thing to do is to get out from under the boat. Then quietly(!) find your seat mate to be sure you are both accounted for.
- The sweep will call out seat numbers to make sure everyone is there, and uninjured.
  - Please reply immediately, “Here!”- when your seat is called.
  - This is why you must remember your seat number.
  - If someone is not responding, the whole boat begins searching in earnest.”
- All paddlers will have to work together to turn the boat upright.
  - The sweep will assign a few swimmers to gather the paddles, hats, water bottles, etc.
  - Then we will spread ourselves out on both sides of the boat to turn it.
  - Anyone working near the bow or stern must be aware of the drummer's seat and the oar as we turn the boat.
- Once upright, we climb in, one at a time. Non-swimmers first. I
- If we didn't lose the bailer, someone starts bailing immediately. The rest of us start paddling to shore.
- If the weather is warm, this can be a leisurely paddle.

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- If the weather/water is cold, things become more urgent. We need to get in to shore ASAP.
- Staying quiet so all can hear the orders from the sweep is paramount. There is plenty of time for joking around when we are safely on shore.

### IN CASE OF MEDICAL EMERGENCY....

- Nobody likes to think about all the scary “what ifs” that can occur in our daily lives. But sometimes we are forced to consider what we need to do if the unthinkable happens.
- In 2024, those attending camp in Tampa witnessed a cardiac emergency during a practice paddle.
  - The camp staff quickly initiated CPR (in the boat!) while the paddlers hurriedly got the boat back to shore.
  - 911 was called from the boat, and emergency services met the boat when it got in.
  - Because life-saving procedures were begun immediately, (and someone in the boat knew CPR), that paddler survived his ordeal, and later that season, was able to return to dragon boating.
  - That taught all of us a lesson. We need someone on board each paddle that knows CPR and basic first aid.
- Ideally, all sweeps and coaches should be certified. But what if the emergency occurs to one of them? Clearly, we need more than just the sweeps and coaches able to respond.