

New Forest & District Sailability

Fitting a Life Jacket for a Sailor who uses a Wheelchair



Our sailors have a range of abilities and preferences, so try to get to know these as much as possible. Introduce yourself; find out the sailor's name and use it. If the sailor is unable to communicate, look at them when asking questions, even though their Carer will be responding.

In this handout we meet Eddie, she has limited mobility and it will take 3 volunteers to fit her lifejacket and sling.

- 2 volunteers to assist when Eddie needs to lean forward.
- 1 volunteer to position the life jacket.



Putting on a lifejacket is much like helping someone into a coat.

1. First check all the straps on the lifejacket are not twisted & that the waist and crotch buckles are undone.
2. Let the sailor do as much as they are able. Ask your sailor how much assistance they require and which arm they want to insert first. Eddie prefers her left arm first.
3. Then her right arm. Take your time and constantly check your sailor is okay.

4 Positioning straps down the sailor's back. If your sailor is able to lean forward, ask them to do so. **Eddie needs assistance - so remember**

- **Always** have 2 volunteers to assist a sailor when they need to lean.
- Each volunteer should place one hand against the sailor's shoulder – **not** under the sailor's armpit
- Explain that you will want them to lean when you say "go"
- Say "Ready, Steady, Go" aloud so everyone is working together (Not 1,2,3)
- As she leans, each volunteer should place their arm behind the sailor's back to support her.
- The third volunteer slides the sling down back of wheelchair.



5. Carefully position the straps down the sailor's back.

6. Fasten the waist buckle. Adjust the waist strap so there is a close, yet comfortable, fit to the sailor's body. RNLI recommend, a clenched fist distance between strap and body.

7. If there is a crotch strap, this must **always** be fitted, So, ensure the crotch strap is straight and pull it forward towards the knee. Be careful as you feed it between the sailor's leg and the side of the wheelchair, keeping it straight.

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8. Pass crotch strap under thigh

- Ask the sailor's permission, if they need assistance moving their leg.
- When you raise their leg, support it by placing your hand underneath.
- Bend your knees, if possible. Try to use your leg muscles, not your arms or back when you do this.

9. Fasten the crotch strap

- If a life jacket has a crotch strap this must **always** be fitted.
- Adjust length of strap, so there is a close, yet comfortable, fit to the sailor's body.

10. You are now ready to assist Eddie with fitting her sling.



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Charity No. 1105212

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