Safety briefing on board

A complete crew briefing before casting off — from moving around on board and man overboard to emergency roles. With short explanations and quiz questions.

Show, don't read out: let the crew handle each item themselves and only then tick it off. Items marked REQUIRED must never be left out of a briefing.

Moving around & conduct on board

Most injuries don't happen in a major emergency but while simply moving around the boat.

- [ ] Explain the basic rule: one hand for the boat, one for yourself — REQUIRED
  When the boat heels suddenly or a wave hits, your grip is the only thing keeping you on board.
- [ ] Hold on only to solid fittings, never to a slack guardrail wire
  Guardrail wires can give way.
- [ ] Always go forward along the windward side deck
  If the boat heels, you slide into the boat rather than over the side.
- [ ] Go down the companionway facing aft and holding on
  Otherwise you risk falling head first into the saloon.
- [ ] Mind the boom: call “gybe-oh” before gybing — REQUIRED
  An uncontrolled crash gybe can kill.
- [ ] Winch safety: keep fingers clear, never wrap a line around your hand
  A running line can cause severe crush injuries.

Lifejackets & tethers

The best lifejacket is useless if it fits badly or isn't to hand in an emergency.

- [ ] Allocate everyone their own lifejacket — REQUIRED
  Everyone is responsible for their own lifejacket for the whole trip.
- [ ] Have everyone put it on and adjust it correctly — REQUIRED
  In an emergency the lifejacket must fit properly straight away.
- [ ] Don't forget to fasten the crotch strap
  Without a crotch strap the lifejacket rides up over your head in the water.
- [ ] Show the safety harness tethers and the jackstays on deck
  So everyone knows where to clip on in rough weather.
- [ ] Agree when to clip on: from Force 5, at night, alone on deck, on the skipper's order — REQUIRED
  Clear rules stop anyone going over the side unsecured.

Man overboard (MOB)

Seconds count. Roles agreed in advance replace chaos with routine.

- [ ] Agree the immediate call: shout “man overboard” loudly — REQUIRED
  Anyone may and should raise the alarm.
- [ ] Spotter: one person points continuously at the casualty — REQUIRED
  In a seaway a head in the water can be lost from sight within seconds.
- [ ] Throw gear: lifebuoy, Lifesling and dan buoy with light into the water — REQUIRED
  Provides buoyancy and marks the spot.
- [ ] Press the MOB button on the GPS/chartplotter (show where it is)
  Saves the exact position of the incident.
- [ ] Show the recovery gear: Lifesling, tackle for hoisting
  A wet, hypothermic person cannot climb back aboard unaided.

Fire on board

Fire spreads frighteningly fast and GRP smoke is highly toxic — and there are few ways out.

- [ ] Show all fire extinguishers: locations, type, service date — REQUIRED
  In a fire, everyone must know at once where the nearest extinguisher is.
- [ ] Demonstrate use: pull the pin, aim at the base of the flames — REQUIRED
  Aim at the base of the fire, not into the flames.
- [ ] Show the fire blanket in the galley
  For fat fires and burning clothing.
- [ ] Never put out a fat fire with water — REQUIRED
  Water on burning fat causes a violent flare-up.
- [ ] Engine fire: use the extinguisher port, don't open the engine compartment wide
  Fresh air would feed the fire with oxygen.

Leaks & water ingress

The most common avoidable sinking comes from a split hose or an open seacock.

- [ ] Show all seacocks: toilet, sink, shower, engine cooling water — REQUIRED
  A split hose below the waterline will flood the boat.
- [ ] Show the softwood bungs (often tied to the seacocks) — REQUIRED
  For plugging a broken through-hull fitting.
- [ ] Show and test the electric and manual bilge pumps — REQUIRED
  If the power fails, the manual pump is the only pump you have.
- [ ] Manual bilge pump handle: where is it kept?
  No handle, no manual pump.
- [ ] Show where the rigging cutters / bolt croppers are kept
  After a dismasting the rig has to be cut away.

Gas & galley

Propane is heavier than air, collects in the bilge and is highly explosive.

- [ ] Show the main gas shut-off valve and the cooker valve — REQUIRED
  Everyone must know both ways of shutting off the gas.
- [ ] Order after cooking: close the bottle first, then the cooker valve
  That way no gas line is left under pressure.
- [ ] If you smell gas: no switches, no flames, no sparks — ventilate and shut off — REQUIRED
  Propane sinks and is explosive.
- [ ] Show the gimballed cooker and let everyone light it
  So everyone can cook safely.

Engine & electrics

In an emergency, someone other than the skipper must be able to start the engine and cut the power.

- [ ] Show how to start and stop the engine and use the gear lever — REQUIRED
  Someone must be able to manoeuvre even without the skipper.
- [ ] Bring lines aboard before starting the engine — no line in the water — REQUIRED
  A line round the propeller leaves you unable to manoeuvre.
- [ ] Show where the battery main switch is — REQUIRED
  Emergency cut-off for an electrical fire or a smell of burning.
- [ ] Show where the emergency tiller is and demonstrate fitting it
  For when the wheel or steering fails.

VHF radio & distress calls

The skipper may be incapacitated — at least one other person must be able to send a distress call.

- [ ] Show the VHF radio and channel 16 — REQUIRED
  Channel 16 is the international distress and calling channel.
- [ ] Explain the DSC distress button and how to trigger an alert — REQUIRED
  Automatically transmits your position and the vessel's identity (MMSI).
- [ ] Explain the three priority levels: MAYDAY, PAN-PAN, SÉCURITÉ
  MAYDAY only for grave and imminent danger to life.
- [ ] At least one other person practises the MAYDAY procedure — REQUIRED
  The skipper could be the emergency.

Pyrotechnics & distress signals

In a real emergency there is no time to read the instructions.

- [ ] Show where the flare container is and what it contains — REQUIRED
  In an emergency you must be able to grab it at once.
- [ ] Explain the types: handheld flares, parachute rockets, smoke signals
  Smoke by day, flares and rockets by night.
- [ ] Safe handling: hold at arm's length, pointing downwind — REQUIRED
  Protects against burns and falling sparks.
- [ ] Check the expiry dates of the flares
  Out-of-date pyrotechnics may fail.

Liferaft & abandoning ship

Only step up into the liferaft when you have to step up into it from a sinking yacht.

- [ ] Show where the liferaft is and its service date — REQUIRED
  On charter yachts it is often stowed deep in a cockpit locker.
- [ ] Explain deployment: make the painter fast to a strong point — REQUIRED
  If the painter isn't made fast, the liferaft drifts away.
- [ ] Golden rule: only take to the liferaft once the deck is under water — REQUIRED
  The yacht is almost always the better lifeboat.
- [ ] Show the grab bag
  A survival kit ready to hand when abandoning ship.

Emergency roles & duties

Emergency roles mean nobody has to stop and think about who does what when it matters.

- [ ] Give everyone a fixed main task plus a backup — REQUIRED
  In an emergency nobody has to stop and think about who does what.
- [ ] Assign MOB roles (spotter, throwing gear, manoeuvre, radio) — REQUIRED
  Well-practised roles save vital seconds.
- [ ] Assign fire roles (shut off gas/fuel, fight the fire, distress call)
  Tasks in parallel instead of chaos.
- [ ] Assign leak roles (seacocks, pumping, distress call)
  Everyone knows their job if water comes in.

First aid & seasickness

Help is a long way off at sea — prevention and what you carry on board count double.

- [ ] Show where the first aid kit / medical kit is kept — REQUIRED
  Quick first aid depends on everyone knowing where it is.
- [ ] Ask the crew about allergies, medical conditions and medication — REQUIRED
  Important in an emergency and for stocking the medical kit.
- [ ] Prevent seasickness: watch the horizon, get fresh air, keep busy
  Prevention works much better than cure.
- [ ] Record emergency contacts for each crew member
  In an emergency, next of kin must be reachable.

Marine toilet & water

The most common charter repair is a blocked toilet — and an open toilet hose has sunk yachts before.

- [ ] Demonstrate the sequence: flush, keep pumping, pump dry — REQUIRED
  Using it correctly prevents blockages and smells.
- [ ] Rule: nothing goes in that you haven't eaten or drunk first — REQUIRED
  No paper or sanitary products in the toilet.
- [ ] Explain the toilet seacocks
  An open toilet hose can flood the boat.
- [ ] Fresh water is limited — use it sparingly
  The tanks have to last the whole trip.

Crew confirmation

By signing, each crew member confirms that they took part in the safety briefing and understood it.

NAME	DATE	SIGNATURE

Legal note: this confirmation serves as a record that a briefing took place and was understood. It is not a waiver of liability — gross negligence cannot be signed away. Responsibility for the yacht and crew remains with the skipper.

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In Sailto the whole crew works through this briefing on their own phones and confirms it by name — you can see at a glance who is ready. Organising your trip is free, permanently.

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