

Grand Rapids Junior Sailing School

Frequently Asked Questions - 2017

Q: How old does my child need to be to start the program?

A: Our program requires that children be five years of age by the date of their class.

Q: Is my child required to be able to swim?

A: Children are encouraged to know how to swim. There is a swim assessment required at the beginning of class and the students jump (or sit on the dock and slide in) from the dock and swim 2 dock lengths to the swim ladder. Students will need to wear their Coast Guard approved life vest during the assessment and at all times during sailing classes on or near the water.

Q. Which class should my child sign up for?

A: Children aged 5 through 11 should routinely sign up for an Optimist Class. This class is ideally suited for beginner sailors. It is the most common boat used around the world to teach children to sail. Children aged 12+ years of age and weigh more than 115 pounds should consider the Butterfly as well as extremely tall, above 5' 8", may want to consider the butterfly. Sailors age 12 weighing more than 125 lbs may sail a laser. And 420 skipper or crew should be 12+ years of age. If you're unsure we recommend that you contact us before signing up.

Q: Can my child take more than one class in a summer?

A: Yes. And some classes may need to be repeated to gain understanding and build confidence

Q: Are your instructors certified?

A: Yes. All GRJSA Senior Instructors hold a current US Sailing Level 1 Small Boat Certification. Our highly qualified Senior Instructors are informed on how to teach more safely, effectively, and creatively. We also have a few Senior instructors that hold the US Sailing Level 2 Small Boat Certification and the US Sailing Level 3 Small Boat Coach Certification

Q: What is an Optimist?

A: An optimist dinghy is quite simply the most common boat used to teach children to sail in the world. It has a single sail, and is small and very manageable even for young children. It cannot sink and is easily righted if it tips over. It is lots of fun and the kids love them.

Q: What is a Butterfly?

A: The Butterfly is a comfortable 12' boat for the young, old, and everyone in between. Many youngsters have enjoyed their first sailing experience on the Butterfly. It has a single sail and can be sailed with one or two sailors.

Q: What is a Laser?

A: No fuss, just sailing. One of the reasons the Laser is so popular is the boat's sheer simplicity. The two-part free-standing mast and sleeved sail make the boat easy to rig and it's lightweight hull make it easy to carry. Lasers have a main sail and are sailed by advanced sailors.

Q: What is a 420?

A: A 420 class boat, (also called a club 420) is a 14 foot fiberglass boat with two sails that is sailed by two people. It is one of the most common two-person sailboats in the world. It is fairly fast and a lot of fun.

Q: Does my child need to have his own personal flotation device PFD (US Coast Guard Approved life jacket)?

A: GRJSA has a limited supply of PFDs that we can lend to your child. We do encourage families to purchase a Coast Guard approved PFD for each child appropriate for their size and weight. All participants must wear a PFD when they are on or near the water.

Q: Will my children be sailing even if the weather is bad?

A: Children should be prepared to sail every day of their class. We can sail in light rain. We will not be on the water if there is lightning and thunder nearby. However once a storm has passed, we may resume sailing. Our instructors are trained to recognize weather conditions that are not suitable for sailing or instruction. On days where conditions are not appropriate to be on the water, we do have activities available in the clubhouse. If we have a tornado watch or warning, we will take shelter next door at the EGR Public Library.

Q: What should my child wear to class?

A: Sailing is often very wet. The first day of class your child will have a swim assessment and should be in their swim suit. Having an extra set of dry clothes available for the end of class is advisable on cold days. Closed toed footwear should be worn at all times as beach areas and boats tend to have sharp edges. A hat and sunglasses are often helpful. If glasses are to be worn there should be a lanyard or other device attached to them in case they are knocked off over water. Sunscreen with at least SPF 15 is highly advised. Sailors should bring a towel.

Q: Can I help out when my child is sailing in the class?

A: Sure. We can always use help at the beginning of class getting the sailors organized. Once they are in their groups, we ask that parents step aside and let the instructors teach the class. Parents are encouraged to view the class from our rocking chairs on the patio or sand area by the play structure. ONLY GRYC members are allowed on the docks, boat and launch area for insurance reasons. Also, some parents have brought treats for the end of class. For those interested in being more involved, we always have room on our GRJSA Board of Directors.

Q: Can I use my own boat in the program?

A: Yes. We are happy to see additional boats. Your boat should be either an Optimist dinghy, Butterfly, Laser or a club 420.

Q: Are there a racing opportunities at GRYC?

A: We have weekly races at GRYC. If you sailor has signed up for sailing school, they may participate in our club races during their sailing session. We race Optis and Butterflies Tuesday Nights (sailor dinner afterwards) and Sunday mornings. Lasers race Thursday nights and Sunday afternoons. If interested in participating, please ask your instructor.