

When a Skipper Goes Missing

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For the inexperienced crew, losing the captain overboard can be the worst nightmare. It happens, and the safety of everyone is instantly at risk. The American Sailing Association recommends using the "Figure Eight" maneuver when a person goes overboard because it is completed without the need to jibe the boat. Inexperienced crew members can learn to sail the boat back to the crew overboard (COB) with just a few basic skills and a little practice.

1. Have the new crew **practice a beam reach** including coming up to a beam reach or falling off to a beam reach from other points of sail. No need to go into the terminology details, just show them how to turn to boat so the wind is abeam.
2. **Practice coming about** from a beam reach to abeam reach on the opposite tack. Emphasize turning into the wind and don't worry about precise sail trim.
3. **Practice stopping the boat** by turning into the wind while easing the mainsheet so the main sail will luff. Use a buoy or fender on the water as a target.

After a little practice the crew, with some coaching from the captain, should be able to string these skills into the Figure 8 which can be used when a person goes overboard (practice by dropping a PFD).

Here is the sequence, which begins with the cry "*crew overboard*"

1. Turn the boat so the wind is abeam (without changing tacks).
2. Come about" after you are at least two boat lengths from the COB. Do not trim the jib, uncleat it and let it fly. The boat should now be sailing back towards the person in the water
3. Aim for a point one to two boat lengths downwind of the COB so you can turn into the wind, easing the main sheet, luffing the main sail to stop the boat close enough to the person to throw a line.
4. Drop the Sails

5. If you are too far away to make contact, get underway on a beam reach and try again. Not only is this an excellent training exercise, it's great fun and everyone will feel better knowing how easy it is to sail back to the person in the water.

For more details and information on the Figure Eight maneuver see *Sailing Fundamentals*, by Gary Jobson (the ASA's training manual, available at major bookstores or at West Marine). For a quick reference on this and other COB techniques, see the "Crew Overboard Rescues" West Advisor in your West Marine Catalogue.