



**USA Water Ski Sanctioned**  
**Learn to Ski Clinic**  
**For People with Disabilities**

**Written By:**

**Ann O'Brine-Satterfield, Disabled Instructor**

**Danny Conner, Senior Driver**

**Kathy Conner, Regional Safety**

**Barbara Muren, Side Skier/Instructor**



---

Ann O'Brine-Satterfield P.O.Box 2607 Winter Haven, Florida 33883  
[annsitski@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:annsitski@tampabay.rr.com) Phone (863)967-2575 Cell (863)224-3043

---

**U CAN SKI 2 WATER SKI TEAM SKIS WATER  
SKIERS WITH VARIOUS DISABILITIES:**

**PARAPLEGIC  
QUADRIPLEGIC**

**AMPUTEE**

**DEAF**

**BLIND**

**STROKE**

**BIRTH DEFECTS**

**CEREBRAL PALSY**

**MUSCULAR DYSTROPHY**

**DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED**

**OR ANY DISABILITY WHERE LIMITED MOBILITY IS AN ISSUE**





## **USA WATER SKI SANCTIONED LEARN TO SKI EVENT FOR THE DISABLED**

### **A. Rated Officials Needed**

**Note: Three officials are required by USA Water Ski in order to have a Learn to Ski Sanctioned Event.**

- 1. Tested Driver**
- 2. Safety Coordinator**
- 3. Certified Instructor**

**The event must also be hosted by an Affiliated Ski Club and I also recommend that BOTH the Driver and the Pin Person have at least a Safety Coordinator's rating from USA Water Ski.**

**1. Driver Rating:** Any "Trained" driver is qualified for a sanctioned Learn to SkiClinic. A Show Skiing driver is the best due to the multiple ropes and slow speeds, but any driver with these skills is sufficient.



**Check list:** Always check the boat before use. Remember, if using someone else's boat, check all fluids and document any damage before use. Assure that all equipment is in proper working order: Trick release, and Pylon, Skylon or Tower is secure. We have found that a Skylon or Tower will work best because of the upward pull.

**Know the site:** Limitations, take off, landings and boat patterns. It is always a good idea to do a test run with the side-skiers before making any runs with a disabled participant. Be sure to use the ropes that will be using during the event to assess them for correct rope length. It will also help you to assess if there are any other safety factors to correct and to make adjustment to boat patterns if necessary.

**The Pull:** When pulling a skier be sure to keep the boat in a straight line for the pattern that will be run. The line should be pulled to a point that will keep the skier and side-skiers in an upright position. When the skiers are ready to be pulled good communication is key. An appointed side-skier should call out: "**In Gear... 1-2-3 Hit It!**" Always consider the weight of the pull and try never to over accelerate. Finally, once the skiers are up look to the appointed side-skier for any speed adjustments.

**The Ride:** When it comes time for the SKIERS to go over the wakes, gently back off the throttle and once the skiers are out side the wake gently accelerate back to the normal speed. Average speeds are between 17 & 18 mph, depending on the skier. Be sure to allow enough turning radius for the length of the ropes being used. Cutting the turn too short could cause a fall and a possible injury. This will also cause additional stress to the side-skiers, not to mention additional wake.

**The Return:** Always be sure that the boat driver, pin puller/safety and appointed lead side-skier are in agreement for the return to shore. All should be in agreement before the start of the pull. Know the designated landing area and the procedures for that landing. If at all possible Participant and side-skiers should land between the wakes to minimize possibility of injuries. Pin puller should watch a designated side skier for a head nod to release the rope. If the rope doesn't release, be prepared for an emergency stop. Once a set of skiers has landed, slow if not stop the boat and return to the take off/landing area for the next set of skiers.

**The drivers consistent pulls and patterns will help ensure a smooth and efficient event.**

## 2. Safety/Pin pulling

**This person MUST have a minimum USA Water Ski Safety Coordinator's Rating and a working knowledge of CPR, water rescue and first aide.**

This person should operate the "Quick Release".  
Work as an observer and take care of the ropes.

But these jobs could be split up between multiple riders.



### **Safety Tips:**

Boat to land communication is a **MUST!** Make sure you understand the types of disabilities the participant has and communicate this info to the Driver, Pin puller and the Side Skiers. Communicate whether they are a Paraplegic, Quad, CP, MS, Blind and whether or not they have any physical limitations or communication issue, such as Developmentally Disabled, Brain Injury and even if the participant is heat sensitive or not along with any other issues that may impact the ride and safety of all involved.

**Never** let the skiers out of your site. Always keep the pin rope in your hand.

**Treat all skiers as if they were attached to the tow line!!**

**When in doubt PULL the quick release pin.**

The Safety/pin person, Boat driver and the side-skiers need to understand each other before the first skier is on the water: Verbal and hand communications.

It is always best to appoint a lead Side-Skier for communications. (Be sure to do this every time as Side-Skier rotates throughout the clinic.)

If the Safety/Pin Puller are the same person, they must wear a flotation at all times. If there is a separate swimmer it is still a good idea to have the pin person wear flotation also. If a parent, spouse or other person wants to ride in the boat, they **MUST** sign the guest membership and release form. It is also at the discretion of the Safety person when and where additional riders will be seated. **As in any safety role, learn your site: Boundaries, water depth, obstacles, currents and tides. Also, know how to reach your on shore safety personnel; whether it would be a preferred walky-talky system or cell phone.**

**Note:** It is always a good idea for the safety person to have an understanding of the equipment being used. Please refer to the equipment section.

**Remember, Safety First, ALWAYS!!**

### 3. Instructor/Dock Master

This is where the process begins. Each skier must be evaluated individually according to their disability and comfort level in the water. This information must then be passed to the side-skiers, driver & safety. From there they are fitted to the equipment that suits their size and needs.

**A level 1 Instructor** may conduct a "learn to ski clinic". Currently there is not a rated test for a disabled instructor. A person must first take the USA Water Ski instructors test and then have special training by a "disabled" instructor. There are many different methods of teaching. As long as it is a safe method it is good.



#### **There are 4 major categories of disabilities that will attend your clinics:**

1. **Spinal cord injuries:** Paraplegic's - which have use of there upper body and Quad-riplegics - which all 4 limbs have been affected.
2. **Illness:** Disabilities such as Muscular Dystrophy, Cerebral Palsy and Polio, etc. These disabilities can vary in severity. While some are in a wheelchair, others could be walking with the aid of crutches or a walker.
3. **Developmentally Disabled or Head injury:** These disabilities can also vary in severity. The main issue is communication. If the student has a mild form of disability, where understanding instructions can be communicated, then the Sit-Ski can be used. If not, then this is where the inner tube comes into play. The important part is that they have a chance to get on the water and feel like they are part of the event
4. **Amputees:** Including Arm, Leg and Multiple amputations and/or birth deformities.

## EQUIPMENT

### 1. Paperwork

A registration paperwork may be obtained from USA Water Ski. A ski club can print Sanction applications, Registration forms and Waivers from the USA Water Ski web site found under "Basic Skills Clinic Kit". Once you give headquarters the names of your 3 officials, date of your clinic, and the location of the clinic, you will be given a sanction number. With no limit to the number of students per clinic. However, 4 students per hour is the average.

### 2. Boat

A 3 event tournament boat is best, but any good inboard ski boat with a center pylon or tower can be used. As of January 2006, a \$500K Insurance policy is required by USA Water Ski for all single prop boats.



### 3. Quick Release

A heavy duty or "Show Release" is a must. One that swivels from side to side would work best but would not be required. A fixed single Release will do just fine.



### 4. Sit Ski

At least 1 beginner sit ski. This ski is used for any skier that cannot stand or has difficulty walking. The "Fresh Start" beginner ski comes with an easy-up block.



## 5. Cages/Seats

At least 2 different size cages will be needed.



## 6. Ropes and Handles

Three ropes the same length with straight handles for 2 ropes and one handle for the student. The type of handle depends on what ski you are using. If you use the beginner ski with the easy-up block then you will need a handle with a ball to go in the block. A Golf ball with a hole drilled through it will work best. If your skier is on an intermediate ski, then a "Deep V" handle is used. The ropes and handle MUST measure the same. All three ropes are connected with a TWINK. A twink is a small section of rope tied together to make a loop then the twink is connected to the pylon



## 7. Lift Jackets

At least 1 Coast Guard approved Jacket in each size. Child, Adult S, M, L, XL & 2XL will be necessary and a Coast Guard approved jacket for each person in the boat. Regulations vary from state to state so check with your local Marine Patrol or Sheriff office for any additional requirements in you area.



## 8. Triple Bar

This is for your "stand up" disabilities such as Blind and Amputee or Hemiplegic. When a Triple Bar is not available a Boom may be used.



## 9. Two way radios

These are very important. The information like what type of disability and limitations of a participant will need to be communicated from the instructor to the boat driver and safety personnel as well as for safety if any help was needed by the boat crew.

## 10. Delgar Sling

This sling is used for a single arm disability or amputee. It mimics the pull on the handle for someone who does not have the use of both arms.



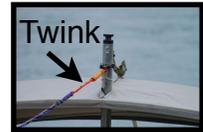
## 11. The Inner Tube:

With disabilities such as a Head Injury, Developmentally Disabled, Autistic and other disabilities where their cognitive skills are an issue or when there disabilities are too severe I recommend the INNER TUBE. The individual gets to feel the thrill of the water in a safe and secure environment.



## SIDE-SKIERS

**A side-skier is an able bodied skier that skis along side the disabled student. All 3 ropes are connected by a small twink that is connected to the quick release. The skiers have their own handles yet can be released from the boat all at the same time. If the student falls the side-skiers go down also to assist the participant in any way needed and also If the student becomes unstable or needs assistance in the turns the side skiers can move in and stabilize them.**



### Skills that make a good side skier:

**This is where skill, not strength, is important.**

Someone that can ski on TWO skis at slow speeds. The ability to get up with one hand on the handle and use other hand to stabilizing the student. Someone that can ski in a squat position for a long period of time and above all, the ability to make the skier feel safe and relaxed by smiling and communicating well with the Participants as well as their fellow volunteers.

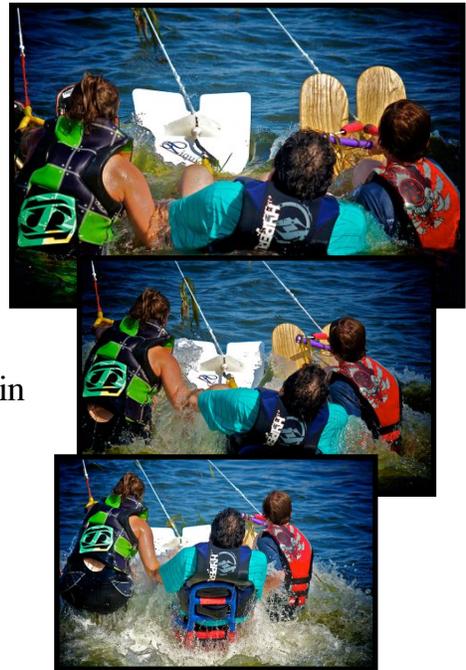


**Skis For Side Skiers:** A pair of jump skis or Classic Show Skis would work best because of their large flat bottom surface area and stability at slow speeds.



### **Side Skiing 101:**

The student is instructed to hold onto the handle or the side of the cage when the E-Z up Handle ball is in the block. The skiers place their hands behind the student's arms on the cage. The side skier then will hold one hand on their handle while stabilizing the student with the other hand. After the student has the E-Z up Handle out of the block and in the correct skiing position with arms straight and their chest is forward in the tucked position and riding smooth on the water the side-skiers can then slowly let go and let them ski free. The side-skier can then coach, instruct and stabilize when needed.



### **SIDE-SKIING IN THE TURNS**

The boat driver should make as wide as possible turns, with the side-skiers keeping the student directly behind the boat and on the bubbles. This is where most falls occur and the pin person should be paying particular attention.



# QUADRIPLAGIC'S

**Low-Level Quads, (c5-6 & below), no grip, but arm movement, can ski successfully when using extreme care and caution along with special equipment.**

**Very Important Note:** Most quadriplegics can NOT turn over if they are face down in the water.

**Equipment:** The larger the ski the better. I suggest our “Jump Ski” or our “Fresh Start” beginner ski because of the large surface area. When a participant dose not have grip, ether from a Spinal Cord injury, Cerebral Palsy or any other disability that prevents them from holding onto the handle then I recommend the ball on the handle be left in the block at the nose of the ski also a Cage with a back support must be used.



## **SUMMARY**

**Your ski club along with a local Rehab Center or Adaptive Sports Program is the perfect combination for a safe and successful "Learn to Ski Clinic" for people with disabilities. While your club provides the skills and talent, the disabled organization provides the students and knowledge about disabilities. I recommend having a practice clinic with your teammates playing the part of the students and then have them rotate with all the side-skiers so they get a feel for it. As long as you have a safe clinic, it is a good one.**

**For all your adaptive water ski equipment and accessories, contact**



**Leon Hester  
2240 Turtlemound Road  
Melbourne, Florida 32934  
(321) 537-1900**