Self-Rescue

You can help save yourself by wearing a PFD and insulative clothes. If the boat is sinking, let it sink under you. Don't jump overboard. If the boat is going down and you have time, put on a PFD, a warm hat, and warm clothes.

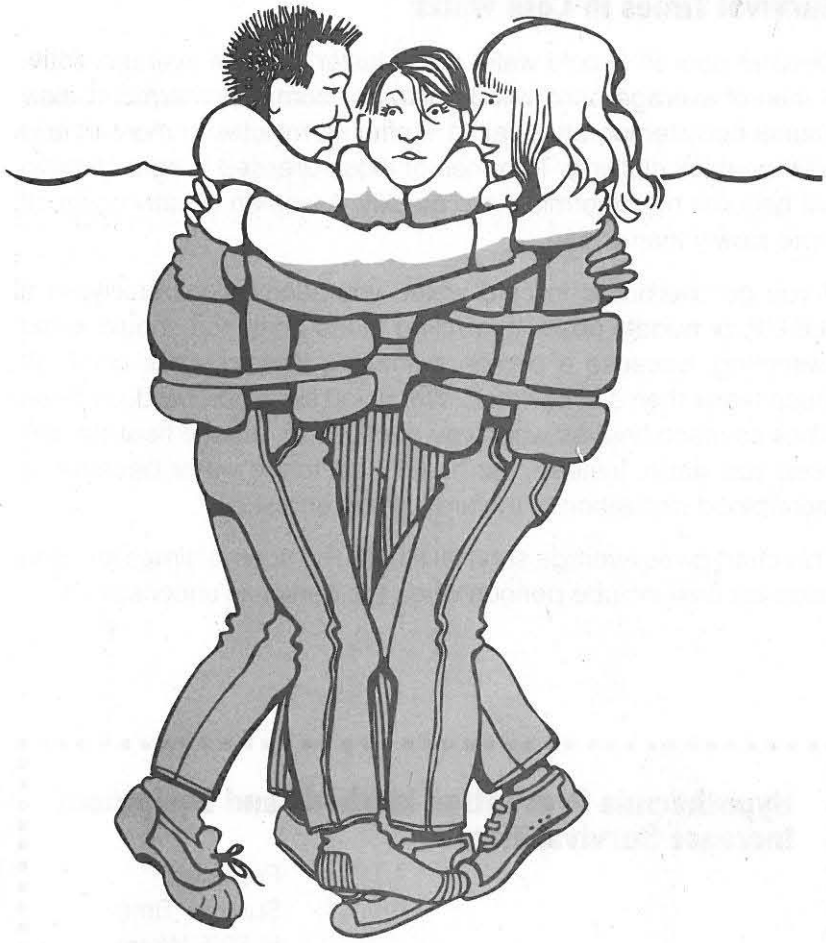
Clothes, including boots, will not drag you down in the water and can help keep you warm. Layers of clothing also trap air, which can help you float. If you take off boots and clothes in the water, you will lose body warmth and energy.

Rule: When in the water, protect high heat-loss areas: head, neck, armpits, sides, and groin.

If you have to get into the water, enter slowly to avoid cold water shock. Try to keep as much of your body as possible out of the water.

Stay with the boat as long as you can, because

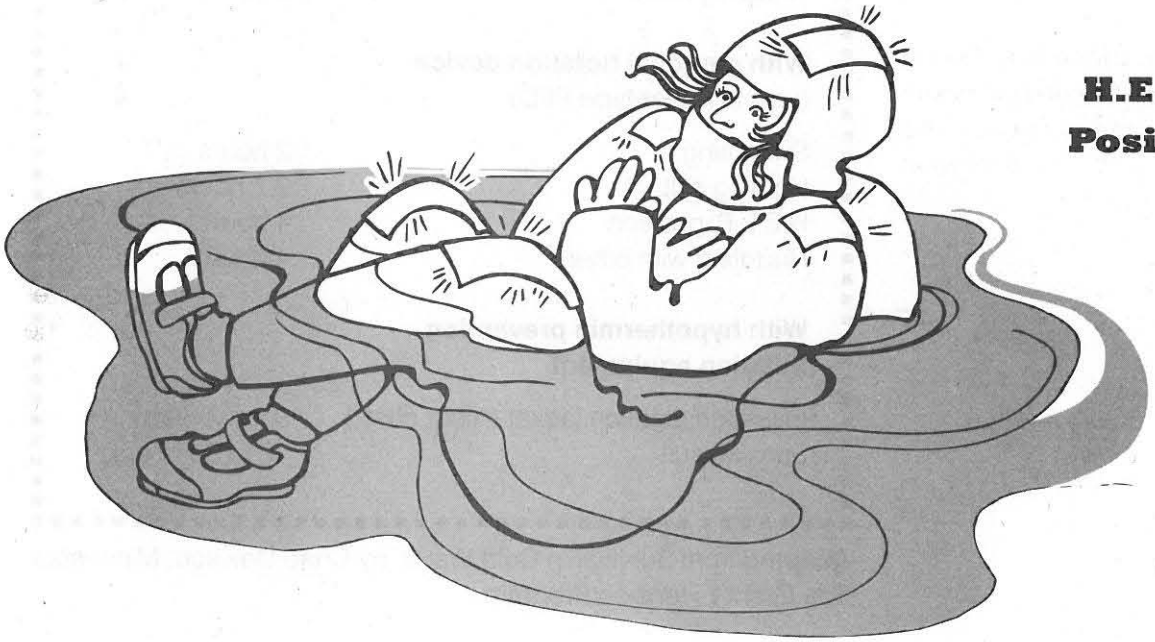
1. The boat will help you float.
2. The boat will be more visible to rescuers.
3. Rescuers will search where the boat was going.



Huddle Position

Rule: Try to float and to minimize heat loss until you are rescued.

Rule: Assume the H.E.L.P. or Huddle position depending on the situation.



H.E.L.P. Position

Survival Times in Cold Water

Children cool off in cold water much faster than the average adult. A man of average build will be helpless from hypothermia (below normal body temperature) at 41°F after 40 minutes or more if he is wearing thick clothing. Thin men or those dressed in light clothing will become hypothermic more quickly. A woman usually cools off more slowly than a man.

If you go overboard in cold water, you should float quietly in a H.E.L.P. or huddle position, or cling to the boat. You should avoid swimming, because a person swimming in cold water cools off much faster than a still person. When you swim you produce three times as much heat as when you are floating, but the heat doesn't keep you warm. Instead, the heat is lost to the water because of more blood circulation to the arms, legs, and skin.

This chart gives average survival times. The survival times are long because they include periods when the person is unconscious.

Rule: Don't try to swim to shore. In cold water a person can swim only 1/10 the distance he or she can swim in a nice warm pool. When you swim, you lose heat. Hypothermia can set in and lead to a quicker death.

Hypothermia Prevention Methods and Equipment Increase Survival Time

	Predicted Survival Time in 50°F Water
Without flotation device worn	
Treading water	2 hours
With personal flotation device (vest or collar-type PFD)	
Swimming	2 hours
Holding still	2.7 hours
H.E.L.P. position	4 hours
Huddling with others	4 hours
With hypothermia prevention flotation equipment	
Insulated flotation jacket ("float coat")	3 to 9 hours
Survival suit	12 to 36 hours

Adapted from Survival in Cold Water, by Chad Dawson, Minnesota Sea Grant Extension Program

Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs)

There are five kinds of PFDs:

Type I.

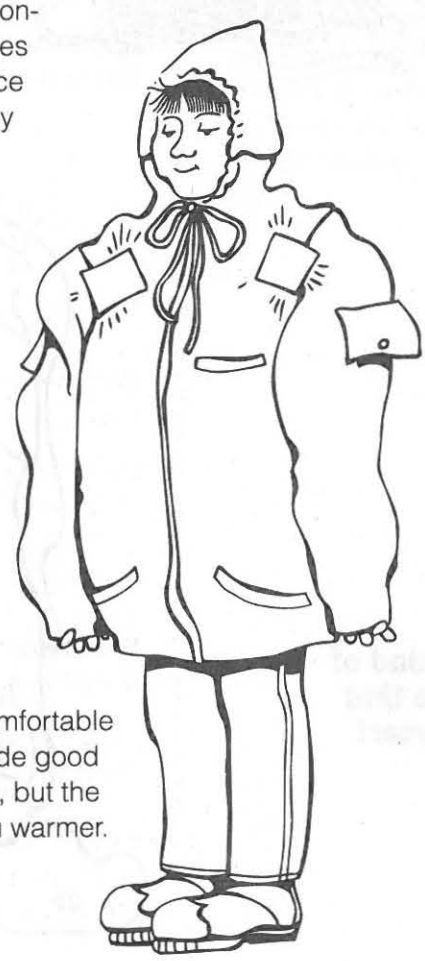
Offshore Life Jacket.

It floats very well, and it turns an unconscious person face up. But it is bulky, and not very warm.

Type II.

Nearshore Buoyant Vest.

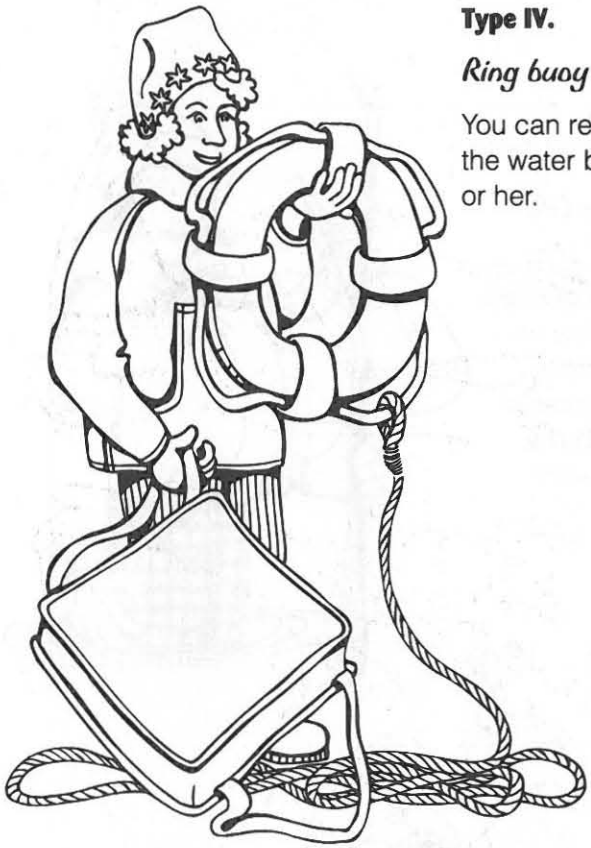
This is a typical life vest. It keeps the head and neck out of the water on unconscious people but it does not always keep the face up. Type IIs are not very warm.



Type III.

Vest, float coat.

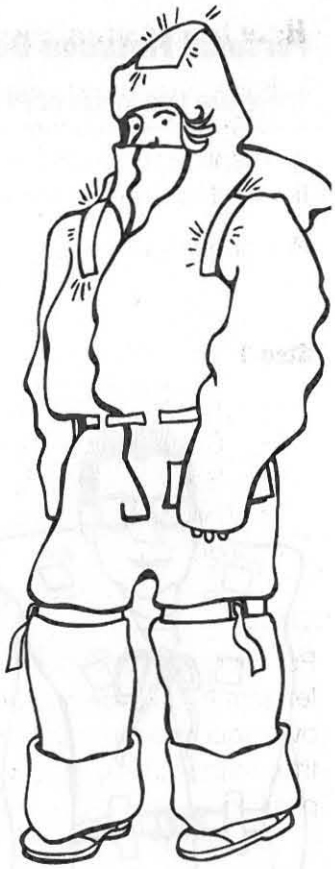
These are the most comfortable PFDs. They both provide good flotation and insulation, but the float coat will keep you warmer.



Type IV.

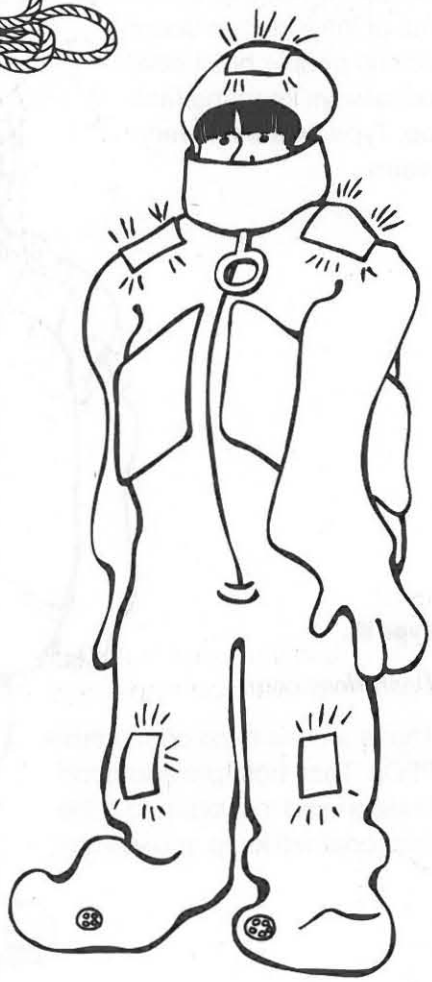
Ring buoy or seat cushion.

You can rescue someone in the water by tossing it to him or her.



Type V. *Overalls.*

These are similar to a survival suit but are much more comfortable to work in. They provide excellent flotation and insulation.



Survival Suit.

A survival suit helps you float and keeps you warm. A person can survive in cold water for up to 24 hours in a survival suit.

The best kind of PFD is one that you will wear!