




Tips for Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing Learners in RI

 Contact adaptive sailing programs directly:

When reaching out to programs like Sail To Prevail or the Downtown Sailing Center, tell them about your hearing needs — many adaptive instructors are flexible and experienced and may use visual signals, cues, or customized communication (whiteboards, clear lines of sight, etc.).

 Join clubs or community classes:

Even “mainstream” sailing schools like Sail Newport or Community Boating Center can often work with you on visual cue-based instruction or pair you with an instructor who has experience teaching students with hearing differences.

 Attend local events:

Adaptive sailing clinics (like Clagett Sailing) and open-house sailing Saturdays are great ways to try sailing with support before committing to a full class.

 Deaf-Focused Sailing Organizations

1. Deaf Sailing International (Online Community)

An international Facebook group/community connecting deaf sailors, deaf skippers, and deaf sailing enthusiasts around the world. (Not a formal nonprofit but useful for networking, experience sharing, and community support.)

2. Deaf Sailing Rona Sailing Project (Social Group)

A community group (Facebook-based) offering deaf, deafened, and hard-of-hearing people the chance to try sailing, including those who have never sailed before

Local sailing organizations and programs in Rhode Island that could support someone with hearing loss (including deaf sailors) to **learn and participate in sailing** — especially through *adaptive or inclusive* opportunities (Providence, RI & Newport, RI area):

 **Adaptive & Inclusive Sailing Programs (Disability-Accessible)**

• **Sail To Prevail — Newport, RI**

A long-established nonprofit adaptive sailing program offering summer instructional sails on specially designed sailboats for children and adults with disabilities. Their instruction focuses on active participation — helm, trim, teamwork — and includes accessible docks and boarding. Scholarships and need-based support are available.

What it offers:

- Adaptive sailing instruction mid-June through mid-August (summer).
- Programs for people with a wide range of disabilities; while not deaf-specific, instructors are experienced with diverse needs and accommodations can often be arranged.
- A youth sailing *camp* in August that is inclusive of kids 7+.

👉 Good first option in **Rhode Island** for someone who wants tailored support to learn how to sail in a structured, adaptive environment.

• **Downtown Sailing Center – Adaptive Sailing Saturdays** (*Providence, RI*)

Although I didn't find an exact business listing, **the Downtown Sailing Center runs a free *Accessibility Sailing* program** on Saturdays for individuals with disabilities, with accessible docks and Hoyer lifts, volunteer coaching, and no cost.

(Note: If you want details on schedule and registration, I can help you find current dates and contacts.)

• **Clagett Sailing (Newport, RI)** (*program, not a listed business*)

A nonprofit adaptive sailing effort based in Newport that runs a clinic and regatta each year and supports sailors with disabilities in improving skills and competitive opportunities.

🌟 **Additional Local Sailing Organizations (may offer lessons / community)**

These aren't deaf-specific or adaptive by default, but they can be valuable places to **connect with sailors, find inclusive coaches, or inquire about accommodations:**

• **Sail Newport — Newport, RI**

Public sailing center offering sailing lessons, rentals, community outreach, and "Try Sailing!" programs. Great for learning fundamentals (you can ask about accommodations for hearing differences).

🚤 Your "Sign" to Learn Sailing -**First Reef Sailing- Boston** Lessons Learned from Sailing with Two Amazing Deaf Students

Captain Paul Sullivan recently had the honor of teaching two incredible deaf sailors. He walked away learning just as much as he taught. Captain Paul of First Reef Sailing recently taught ASA 101 with two awesome hearing-challenged sailors.

"Their connection to the boat, the water and each other was inspiring. Without relying on sound, they tuned into subtle cues: the feel of the wind, the pressure on the helm, and the shape of the sails. Every tack, gybe and feathered-upwind course was a masterclass in awareness." Captain Paul had his students practice mooring drills but with a twist: using sign language to communicate from bow to helm. No shouting. No guesswork. Just clear, calm signals and smooth teamwork.

Communication was clear, focused and full of trust. It was a great reminder that sailing doesn't depend on words, just teamwork and presence. "Sailing is always about connection — to the boat, the crew, and the moment. And this crew nailed it."

<https://www.firstreefsailing.com/sailing-lessons>

<https://seapeopleapp.com/blog/deaf-sailing>



Communication Strategies

✓ Pre-plan everything

- Review the sailing plan before leaving the dock
- Assign roles clearly (helm, trim, lookout, etc.)
- Agree on commands and signals ahead of time
- Discuss emergency procedures in advance

✓ Use visual hand signals/ Many crews use large, exaggerated gestures so they're easy to see from across the boat.

Create simple, standardized signals like:

- Stop / danger
- Tack
- Jibe
- Ease sail
- Trim sail
- Man overboard
- Head in / head out

✓ Write or type when needed

- Waterproof notepad/whiteboard
- Boogie board with pencil
- Phone notes app
- Pre-printed cue cards

✓ Positioning for lip reading

- Face the speaker
- Stand in good light
- Avoid talking while looking away or covering your mouth

⚓ Safety & Awareness Tools

✓ Visual alerts instead of sound

- Flashing lights for alarms
- Vibrating watches/phone alerts
- Strobe distress lights at night
- Visual timers for race start or drills

✓ Extra lookout habits

- Assign a dedicated visual lookout
- Scan 360° frequently
- Use binoculars
- Check AIS/chart plotter/radar more often if available

✓ **Life jackets & signaling gear**

- Bright colored PFD
 - Personal strobe light
 - Whistle (for others)
 - Air Horn
 - Handheld VHF with text display if possible
 - Signal mirror or flag
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 **On-Water Communication Systems**

✓ **Flag or paddle signals**

Some crews use:

- Colored flags
- Paddles/cards
- Raised arms
- Head nods/shakes


✓ **Tactile cues**

- Tap on shoulder = look at me
- Two taps = tack
- Pointing to lines/sails

✓ **Buddy system**

Sail with:

- A consistent partner
 - Someone who knows your communication style
 - Or another deaf sailor
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 **Training & Preparation**

✓ **Practice drills visually so everyone knows what to do without verbal commands.**

- Man overboard
- Docking
- Reefing
- Emergency turns

✓ **Take formal classes with accommodations**

Adaptive/inclusive programs (like Sail To Prevail in Newport) often:

- Use demonstration-based teaching
- Stand close while instructing
- Write steps
- Slow down communication






✓ **Learn maritime hand signals or nautical sign language**

Some programs use standardized signals specifically for sailing crews.

SAILING HAND SIGNALS CHEAT SHEET

Visual Communication for Deaf & Hard-of-Hearing Sailors

Basic Commands

Signal	Meaning
 Hand up (stop sign)	STOP / HOLD
 Thumbs up	OK / READY
 Thumbs down	NOT READY / PROBLEM
 Wave toward yourself	COME HERE
 Point + eye contact	LOOK / PAY ATTENTION

Sailing Maneuvers

Signal	Meaning
Arm sweep across chest → opposite side	TACK
Arm sweep behind back → opposite side	JIBE
Fist circle overhead	TURN AROUND
Both arms pointing forward	HEAD UPWIND
Both arms pointing back	BEAR AWAY / DOWNWIND

Sail Trim

Signal	Meaning
Pulling motion with both hands	TRIM / PULL IN
Pushing motion away	EASE / LET OUT
Point to sail then thumbs up	GOOD TRIM
Point to sail then shake head	ADJUST SAIL

Safety & Emergency

Signal	Meaning
Arms crossed in “X” overhead	EMERGENCY / DANGER
Point repeatedly at water	MAN OVERBOARD
Rapid arm wave overhead	NEED HELP
Tap head repeatedly	CHECK IN / ARE YOU OK?
Hand slicing throat (timeout sign)	STOP IMMEDIATELY

WHISTLES AND HORNS FOR ALERTING SAILORS OF DANGER

The Original Worlds Loudest Whistle up to 142db Loud, Very Long Range, for Referee, Coaches, Instructors, Sports, Teachers, Life Guard, Self Defense, Survival, Emergency uses. List Price: \$19.95



She's Birdie-The Original Personal Safety Alarm for Women by Women-Loud Siren, Strobe Light and Key Chain. List Price: \$29.95



KOSIN 6 Pack 140DB Personal Alarm with LED Lights, Emergency Safety Alarm. List Price: \$24.99



Saillong 1.4oz Marine Boat Air Horn, Loud Air Horns for Safety, Mini Small Blow Fog Bear Horn, Meet Coast Guard, Emergency Use for Marine Boating Sporting Events Outdoor Alarm
List Price: \$42.99

- Xxerciz Air Horn Holder with Adjustable Hook & Loop Fits 1.4oz- 8oz Canister, Portable Bear Horn Holster with Lanyard for Boating, Hiking Camping and Sporting Events
List Price: \$9.99

