Making it stop

Controlling boat speed and stopping are techniques that beginners learn and practice on their first day afloat. However, as Simon Winkley, RYA Coach/Assessor, explains, the seemingly simple idea of stopping a dinghy uses fundamental coaching points for intermediate students too.

Obviously there are many reasons why you might want to stop your boat, but in a training environment one of the key reasons is to switch helm and crew positions.

Often a student's idea of stopping the boat is to go head to wind. While this will of course stop the boat, it puts a swinging boom over the heads of those on board and increases the chance of being blown one way or the other into a sailing position. Consequently the lying-to and hove-to positions are preferred.

Lying-to is simply letting the sails fully out, turning towards the wind a little then centralising the tiller. On stayed boats this would mean the boom is positioned just off the shrouds. A simple way to describe this position is that the sails are head to wind and the boat is on a close reach.

An alternative method is **Heaving-to**, which can be achieved in two ways:

Heaving-to: method 1

1. From the lying-to position the crew pulls the jib across to the windward side and cleats it off tightly, taking care not to damage the leech on any mast fittings.
2. At this point the helm can slowly push the tiller away, taking care not to tack. The rudder is trying to turn the boat towards the wind while the backed jib is trying to turn it away.

To maintain control, the balance of the boat should be flat when stopped

Heaving-to: method 2

A more dynamic alternative to method 1 is to tack into the hove-to position.

1. From a close hauled course, tack the boat ensuring the jib remains tight.
2. The boat will come through the wind, the jib will back itself and the helm must swiftly dump all of the mainsheet and push the tiller to the new leeward side.

This can be a very swift and effective way of stopping a boat and, done well, will give students a very dynamic sense of boat control.

Once in the hove-to position, the two forces of the rudder and the backed jib effectively pin the boat in a position where it appears to have stopped. Getting the students to examine the water at the stern (the small wake) and on the windward side (the swirling eddies) can highlight how the boat is actually moving slowly forwards and sideways simultaneously.

In strong winds with the backed jib square across the wind, a large gust could push the boat sideways hard enough to cause the boat to 'trip' on its own centreboard. Raising the centreboard to about half way reduces this risk by allowing the boat to slip sideways. However, you need to bear in mind the increased distance needed between the boat and a lee shore to cater for this sideways slippage.

Other considerations when stopped

Balance: Keeping the boat very flat is important when lying-to or heaving-to.

In the hove-to position, jamming the end of the tiller extension into the leeward toestrap frees up the helm's hands and prevents the boat steering off course.

Mainsail: Reduce the power in the mainsail by letting the kicker off.

Rights of way: Even though the boat might feel like it is stopped, it is not secured to the sea bed and it will have a little propulsion from its sails, so it is technically underway and making way, and therefore must give way when required to do so. Stopping the boat on starboard tack avoids the potential for having to give way while limited in ability to manoeuvre.

Blending a range of stopping exercises into other activities afloat adds an extra challenge and promotes safer sailing.

Heaving to: locking-off the tiller leaves both hands free for the helm

Heaving to: raising the centreboard can improve stability in gusty conditions