



WATER SAFETY AND DROWNING

**A guide for teenagers and
young people**

WHY DOES WATER SAFETY MATTER?

Being by water is a great place to spend time with friends, but it's important you know how to keep yourself, and your friends, safe.

We want to help you feel confident in making safe choices around water all year round, so that this doesn't happen to you or your friends.

Water may look safe, especially a familiar stretch of water local to you, but poor decisions around it can create a dangerous situation.

In the UK, approximately 400 people die from drowning annually, with a higher risk for males. The majority of these incidents occur in inland waters, and many are related to recreational activities. These are scary statistics.

OUT WITH YOUR FRIENDS

A hot day in the summer holidays, what better way to cool down than by jumping into your local lock. Big mistake! There may be Tik Tok trends, and there may be dares and bets, but do not try to jump over the canal, jump into a lock or jump off bridges. There are no lifeguards along canals and rivers to help you.

Also, if you're on a secluded part of the water, it will take the emergency services much longer to reach you.. It may be a place with limited access to communication or a location where calling for emergency services may be challenging with poor mobile phone reception.

DO YOU KNOW HOW DEEP THE WATER IS?

Canals are often quite shallow, and you could easily hit the bottom if you jump from a height. You can't always tell from the surface how deep they are, therefore you could injure yourself seriously if you jump in.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT'S IN THE WATER?

Consider that there are diseases and reeds, and also plant life that can tangle around your limbs, possibly dragging you down. Waterborne diseases are extremely rare, but if you are swimming, you're most likely exposed to them. The water may contain pollution, biological or chemical contaminants. Bear this on mind if you come into contact with water and follow basic hygiene measures.

JUST BECAUSE YOUR FRIEND SUGGESTS IT, WHY HURT YOURSELF TO SHOW OFF?

Remember, don't just be a by-stander, watch out for your mates. Tell them they're doing something dangerous, and they could get hurt.

COLD WATER SHOCK – THE STATS

No matter how strong a swimmer you are, you can't prepare for cold water shock.

- It reacts to the cold water by drawing the blood away from muscles to protect the organs and making it difficult to move limbs.
- The cold water will make you gasp uncontrollably.
- Your heart will beat really fast, you'll lose energy quickly, and eventually your muscles will become paralysed.

SWIM IN SAFE AREAS ONLY

It's always best to swim in places that are supervised by a lifeguard. No one can anticipate changing ocean currents, rip currents, sudden storms, or other hidden dangers. If something does go wrong, lifeguards are trained in rescue techniques.

Swimming in an open body of water (like a river, lake, or ocean) is different from swimming in a pool. You need more energy to handle the currents and other changing conditions in the open water. Strongly consider wearing a personal floatation device in open bodies of water, even if you are a strong swimmer.

If find yourself caught in a rip current, don't panic and don't fight the current. Try to swim parallel to the shore until you can get out of the current, which is usually a narrow channel of water. Gradually try to make your way back to shore as you do so. If you can't swim away from the current, stay calm and float with it. The current will usually slow down. When it does, you can swim to shore.

Even a very good swimmer who tries to swim against a strong current will get worn out. If you'll be swimming in an open body of water, it's a great idea to take swimming lessons that offer tips on handling unexpected hazards.

Some areas with extremely strong currents are off limits when it comes to swimming. Do your research so you know where not to swim and pay attention to any warning signs posted in the area.

BE CAREFUL ABOUT DIVING

Diving injuries can cause head injury, permanent spinal cord damage, paralysis, and sometimes even death. Protect yourself by only diving in areas known to be safe, such as the deep end of a supervised pool. If an area has "No Diving" or "No Swimming" signs, pay attention to them. A "No Diving" sign means the water isn't safe for a head-first entry. Even if you plan to jump in feet first, check the water's depth before you leap to make sure there are no hidden rocks or other hazards. Lakes or rivers can be cloudy, and hazards may be hard to see.

WATCH THE SUN

Sun reflecting off the water or off sand can intensify the burning rays. You might not feel sunburned when the water feels cool and refreshing, but the pain will catch up with you later. Remember to reapply sunscreen often and cover up much of the time. Don't forget your hat, UV protection sunglasses, and protective clothing.

DRINK PLENTY OF LIQUIDS

It's easy to get dehydrated in the sun, particularly if you're active and sweating. Keep up with fluids — particularly water — to prevent dehydration. Dizziness, feeling lightheaded, or nausea can be signs of dehydration and overheating.

GETTING TOO COOL

Staying in very cool water for long periods can lower your body temperature. A temperature of 70°F (20°C) is nice on land, but water below that will feel cold to most swimmers. Your body temperature drops far more quickly in water than it does on land. And when you're swimming, you're using energy and losing body heat even faster. Check yourself when swimming in cold water and stay close to shore. If you feel your body start to shiver or your muscles cramp up, get out of the water right away. It doesn't take long for hypothermia to set in.

ALCOHOL AND WATER NEVER MIX

Alcohol is involved in many water-related injuries and up to half of all water-related deaths. The statistics for teen guys are particularly scary: One half of all teen male drownings are related to alcohol use.

KEY STEPS FOR WATER SAFETY AND CALLING FOR HELP:

1. Stay Calm and Float:

·If you fall into the water unexpectedly, try to stay calm and float on your back until you can control your breathing.

2. Call for Help:

·Use a phone to call 999 or 112 and ask for the coastguard or fire service, depending on the location.

3. If Someone Else is in Trouble:

·Don't enter the water: Never attempt a rescue yourself.

·Call 999/112: Dial the emergency number and ask for the coastguard or fire service, depending on the location.

· Look for something to throw: Try to find a life ring, float, or any other object that can help the person float.

· Keep watch: Stay by the water's edge until help arrives.

4. If you are able to reach someone from the bank, use an object to reach them, such as a rope, pole, or tree branch

VALUABLE RESOURCES

There's some excellent and valuable advice that can be shared with children and young people in the following [PDF](#):

Also, some great resources on:

- [The Water Safety Code](#).
- [Environment Agency - Water Safety Advice](#).
- [RoSPA Water Safety](#).