

# Water safety: Have you got their back?

This lesson, developed by the Canal & River Trust, focuses on safety around inland bodies of water. It supports students to analyse risks around canals, rivers, waterways, lakes and ponds, including understanding the role peers can play in supporting each other to stay safe. This lesson supports the 'Have you got their back?' campaign from the Canal & River Trust.

## Learning objective

To learn how to manage risks and stay safe around inland bodies of water.

## Learning outcomes

**Students will be able to:**

- assess risk in situations involving inland bodies of water
- explain how to keep safe or reduce risks around waterways
- describe or demonstrate how to manage peer influence and exit risky situations safely

## Resources

- Box or envelope for questions
- PPT: *Have you got their back?*
- Resource 1: Water scenarios (one scenario per group)
- Resource 2: I won't jump (support resource, print as needed)
- Resource 3: Glossary (support resource, print as needed)



**QUALITY  
ASSURED  
RESOURCE**  
PSHE ASSOCIATION

## Lesson summary

Activity	Description	Timing
1. Introduction	Introduce the learning objective, outcomes and ground rules for the lesson.	5 mins
2. Baseline assessment	Students respond to an image to demonstrate their initial understanding of risk and how to stay safe.	10 mins
3. Water scenarios	In groups, students explore scenarios of young people near water and what might increase or decrease risk.	10 mins
4. Peer support	Students create scripts responding to peers who might try to persuade them to get in the water.	15 mins
5. Responding to emergencies	Students create a list of strategies about what someone, and their friends, could do if they get into danger in the water.	10 mins
6. Signposting support and personal reflection	Make students aware of where they can get help or advice on water safety, including when to call 999.  Students reflect on when this learning might be most relevant to them.	5 mins
7. Endpoint assessment	Students revisit the image from the baseline assessment and add new learning to demonstrate their progress.	5 mins
		Total: 60 mins

### Climatefor learning

Ensure you read the Teacher Guidance document that accompanies this lesson. This provides essential information on creating a safe learning environment, life-saving strategies in and around water, and signposts further support.

### Key words

- River
- Canal
- Lock
- Lake
- Waterway
- Depth
- Risk
- Cold water shock
- Peer pressure

# Baseline assessment

## Introduction (slides 2-3)

5 mins

Using slide 2, revisit or negotiate ground rules for the lesson. Introduce students to the learning objective and outcomes and explain that today's lesson will explore how to stay safe around water, especially when spending time around water with friends.

Remind students of the question box, where they can place questions anonymously throughout the lesson, if they don't want to ask them in front of their peers.

## Baseline assessment activity (slide 4)

10 mins

Show the image on slide 4, which shows a typical British waterway. **Without giving any further prompting, ask students to write their initial ideas in their books, and then share ideas as a pair:**

- What are some of the risks young people might come across here?
- How can we keep ourselves and others safe near the water?

After a few minutes, take some feedback from the class to help you gauge their current understanding about risks around water. Use this feedback to reflect on where to spend time during the lesson or how to adapt activities to address gaps in knowledge.

If students are unfamiliar with terminology related to water environments and safety, share with them Resource 3: Glossary to encourage familiarity with key terms supported by images.

# Core activities

## Water scenarios (slides 5-7)

10 mins

Organise students in groups and give each group one scenario from Resource 1: Water scenarios (you may need to give the same scenario to more than one group).

**Ask them to discuss:**

- What are the potential risks in this situation?
- What might make the situation safer?

Take some brief feedback, using slide 6 to help you. **Students are likely to identify:**

- **Risks in scenario 1:** Canal boats might be trying to pass through, mechanisms on the canal locks can be heavy and dangerous, they are drinking alcohol, the lock gates are narrow, the drop on one side is very long, and on the other the water is very deep.
- **Risks in scenario 2:** The rocks and riverbank are slippery, they're pressuring each other to take risks, they don't know what's in the river, the depth or the strength of the current, the bridge is a high place to jump from.
- **Risks in scenario 3:** They haven't been to the lake alone before, there isn't anyone else nearby to help, the lake water might be dirty and has wildlife (ducks) in it, Anton is thinking about a 'dramatic' way to leap in to impress the others, even though his mum has warned him not to swim in the lake. He could be at risk of cold water shock if he jumps in.

- **For all scenarios, to make the situation safer:** Staying out of the water and a distance from the edge would be best. In scenario 1, not drinking alcohol would make a considerable difference as alcohol can encourage people to take bigger risks and can make them clumsier. In scenario 2, the situation would be safer if they weren't pushing each other to take risks, and in scenario 3, Marla has suggested risk-assessing Anton's decision by judging the water depth.

Next show slide 7 and introduce the 'what if' additions to each scenario. Ask groups to decide if the new information they have makes the situation more or less safe, and why.

**Students should identify that:**

- **Scenario 1 'What if':** Less safe – Eddy is now under pressure to go through with the dangerous activity and may find it harder to back out or change his mind.
- **Scenario 2 'What if':** More safe – the weather changing might mean the friends decide to pack up and go home, and the fence is preventing them from getting to the edge.
- **Scenario 3 'What if':** Less safe – the friends have realised the water is really cold, and this is increasing their risk of getting hypothermia or cold-water shock. The girls are wading in, which may be a safer approach to judge the temperature of the water gradually. However, this can lead to hypothermia if too long is spent in the water, so if water feels uncomfortably cold, the girls should get back out or only spend a very short time in the water. Jumping into cold water is much less safe, as this can create an instant reaction called cold-water shock, which can affect breathing, limb control and heart rate and has led to people drowning.

**Support:** Give students scenario 1, which includes easier-to-identify risks and ways to make the situation safer. Resource 3: Glossary could also be used to support students identifying risks in this scenario.

**Challenge:** Ask students to create their own 'what if' additional information which would affect the situation and explain why it would make it either safer or more dangerous.

## Peer support (slides 8-9)

15 mins

Show students the start of a conversation on slide 8, where a group of young people are at the water, and one young person is trying to persuade their friend to jump in.

Ask groups to quickly list any reasons they can think of for why the young person might want to jump in, and reasons why they might not. Invite them to share their ideas and record them on the whiteboard. **These could include:**

- **Reasons they might want to:** to impress their friends, think it looks fun, think they will look cool, they like taking risks, they are a good swimmer and think it will be fine.
- **Reasons they might not want to:** there could be unknown/hidden dangers, the water might be much colder/faster/deeper than they think, they won't look cool if they get into trouble, they could get seriously hurt or ill, people don't actually think jumping in is cool.

Using slide 9, explain to students that the young person has decided they don't want to jump in. Ask them to work in pairs to script how the character might respond, in a way that explains their choices and helps them resist pressure. **Pairs should think about:**

- the reasons the person doesn't want to jump in
- the possible risks and importance of personal safety
- how they might effectively communicate this to their friend

Finally, ask students to consider how other friends or peers could play a supportive role in reinforcing the person's decision not to jump (and why this matters): Have they got their back?

Remind them of how Dominique made the situation safer for Anton by reminding him of someone else who had got into trouble at the lake before. Ask students to create a list of phrases the friends and peers around the situation could say to support the person who doesn't want to jump, and to demonstrate they have their back.

**For example students might suggest phrases such as:**

- "You're right mate, its not worth the risk."
- "You don't need to prove anything to us."
- "Back off and leave them alone. It's their choice."
- "We've got your back – don't hurt yourself on a bad jump."
- "We can do something else, come on let's go."

**Support:** Give students Resource 2: I won't jump to help structure their script.

**Challenge:** If time allows, some of these responses could be acted out in front of the class, with you playing the role of the 'persuasive' friend. Volunteers can be selected to respond, and other classmates could potentially feedback on their responses.

## Responding to emergencies (slides 10-11)

10 mins

Back in their groups, show slide 10 and ask students to mind map what they think a group of young people should do if their friend were to fall into the water accidentally, or had jumped in and found themselves in danger.

Once they have had some time to discuss, create a class list of strategies, and then compare these with the key water safety messages on slide 11, to see how many the class were able to identify (e.g. float to live, call 999, stay together, shout for help, throw something that can float, use a rope).

**Support:** If students are struggling to come up with safety strategies, you could show the icons on slide 11 (without the words) first, to act as prompts for their ideas.

## Plenary / Assessment for and of learning

### Signposting support & personal reflection (slides 12-13)

5 mins

On slide 12 remind students that if they have concerns about personal safety, including around water, they can speak to a trusted adult either at home or at school. Highlight key members of staff including their tutor, head of year and the designated safeguarding lead.

Let students know they can find more information on how to stay safe around water on the following webpage: [www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/advice-for-teens](http://www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/advice-for-teens)

**Next, show slide 13 and ask students to quietly reflect to themselves:**

- When and where might this learning be most relevant to you?
- What might you say to someone who is trying to persuade you to do something unsafe?

As these are personal reflection questions, students should not be encouraged to share their responses with the rest of the class.

Finally, revisit the image from the baseline assessment (shown again on slide 14) and ask students to reflect on their answers now.

- Is there anything they want to change about their initial ideas?
- Can they add any more information about possible water risks?
- Can they add more details about how to stay safe around water, including in emergencies?
- Can they explain the role peers play in keeping each other safe around water?

## Extension activity

Share with students the 'Have you got their back?' campaign poster, and explain that the Canal & River Trust would like to spread the message of this campaign further. **Ask students to consider how to spread the campaign further:**

- Who needs to see this message?
- What other risk scenarios around water could be used to highlight the message?
- How would you reach other young people with this message? For example, students could be encouraged to design a storyboard for an advert or social media video)
- How will we know if the campaign has been successful?