

Teacher Guidance: Canal & River Trust

Water safety: Have you got their back?

This guidance accompanies the Canal & River Trust's lesson on water safety and peer influence. It forms a part of the *Have you got their back?* campaign, co-designed with young people and aimed at keeping them and their friends safe around inland bodies of water. This lesson is for key stage 3 and supports students to identify risks and manage peer pressure in relation to water safety; focusing on inland bodies of water such as lakes, canals and rivers.

Please read this guidance before teaching the lesson.



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Introduction

Who are the Canal & River Trust?

The Canal & River Trust is the UK's largest canal charity, caring for a 2,000-mile network of canals and navigable rivers. Connecting many of the UK's urban and rural areas, these waterways provide essential spaces for wildlife and people, helping us all feel happier and healthier.

The Canal & River Trust also works with young people, providing opportunities for them to develop their knowledge and skillsets through volunteering, apprenticeships and resources, including helping young people understand how to engage positively with the water and stay safe around canals and waterways.

Why teaching about water safety is important

Water safety, and safety in environments where young people are independent more broadly, has always been an essential part of the PSHE education curriculum. However, there is an increasing risk of young people coming to harm around inland bodies of water. Young people are drawn to risk and keen to impress their friends, so are taking greater and greater risks around water; for example, jumping into rivers or canals from bridges.

There were 277 accidental drownings in the UK in 2021. 62% of these happened at inland waters and 83% of those affected were male, with the highest risk age group being males aged 15-22. Danger in and around water becomes particularly relevant as temperatures rise, as 46% of UK accidental drownings in 2022 took place in the three summer months of June, July and August.

Young people therefore need, and are calling for, education to support them to recognise and manage risks around water, including resisting pressure from peers and understanding what to do if they, or their friends, get into trouble in the water. This lesson would work well integrated as part of wider learning about personal safety and risk management. See the appendix for curriculum links to the [PSHE Association Programme of Study](#) and the [Department for Education's RSHE statutory guidance](#).

Developing subject knowledge

It is essential that young people can assess and manage risks around water, in order to make informed decisions. Whilst some young people might carry out some form of risk assessment, such as measuring the depth of the water before they get in, they are often not aware of other risks, such as:

- hidden obstacles in the water e.g. discarded trolleys, bikes, rubbish, or underwater structures such as cills in a lock chamber or sluice gates
- plant life and weeds becoming tangled around limbs
- judging the current in a river, and the flow of water in a canal, especially around weirs and locks
- contracting water-borne diseases
- low water temperatures cause the body to go into cold water shock and in some cases, hypothermia
- peer pressure can also increase these risks, as young people encourage one another to take greater risks around water or seek to impress each other.

Knowing how to fight cold water shock

If someone falls into cold water, they are likely to be confused and frightened and the natural instinct will be to fight the water – to swim hard. But the cold water makes people gasp uncontrollably, speeds up the heart rate, and means they will lose energy quickly, breathe in lots of water, or find muscles become paralysed.

Float to live: Advice from the RNLI (Royal National Lifeboat Institution) is for anyone who falls in the water to float on their back, keeping airways clear, controlling breathing and allowing the cold-water shock to pass. This will help the person to call out for help or regain their strength to swim to shore. You can find more information and a video demonstrating the float to live technique on this page: www.rnli.org/safety/float

Knowing what to do if someone else gets into danger

It's also essential young people are aware of what to do if a friend or peer gets into trouble in the water. The main advice is to never get into the water; even strong swimmers can find themselves in trouble when trying to help others. Instead:

- Stay calm and think before acting.
- There may be other people around, so shout for help as loudly as possible.
- Dial 999 and ask for the Fire and Rescue Service if you're inland, or coastguard if you're on the coast. Explain the location clearly; using road names, bridge numbers and describing any landmarks.
- Keep an eye on the person, keep talking to them and stay near them. Encourage them to float on their back in a star shape.
- If possible, throw a safety line or rope to them. Otherwise lie down to create stability and use a tree branch, stick or an item of clothing to reach out to them.

Creating a safe learning environment

A safe learning environment helps students feel comfortable with sharing their ideas and opinions without attracting negative feedback and will help teachers to manage discussions confidently. It is good practice for teachers to:

- work with students to establish ground rules about how they will behave in discussion, such as;
 - Everyone has the right to be heard and respected.
 - We will use language that won't offend or upset other people.
 - We won't judge or make assumptions about anyone, their feelings, or experiences.
 - We will comment on what was said, not the person who said it.
 - We won't share our own personal experiences, or those of anyone we know.

- We won't put anyone on the spot, and we have a right to pass.
- offer opportunities for students to discuss issues in small groups as well as sharing views with the class
- make a box/envelope available for students to put questions or concerns in (anonymously if they wish), to avoid having to voice them in front of the class
- provide factually accurate, up to date information
- provide balanced arguments to help students clarify their own opinions
- be sensitive to the needs and experiences of individuals
- use distancing strategies to discourage personal disclosures in the classroom, allow students to explore topics objectively, and to keep the learning environment safe
- always work within the school's policies on safeguarding and confidentiality
- link PSHE education into the whole school approach to supporting student wellbeing
- make students aware of sources of support, both in and outside the school.

Further guidance on creating a safe learning environment is available from the [PSHE Association](#).

Using role play safely

An option for role play is suggested in the lesson during the 'Peer Support' activity, where students rehearse what someone could say to a friend who was trying to persuade them to jump into water.

Role-play provides a great opportunity to rehearse communication skills and to practise the language needed to resist peer pressure. However, it is important that role play is managed safely, and additional ground rules may be needed. Ensure:

- students are not asked to role play themselves, people they know, or situations they have been in
- students are not asked to role play negative behaviours (you, or another adult in the room,

should play the role of the persuasive friend)

- students have the right to opt out if they feel uncomfortable
- allow time for students to come 'out of role', for example by removing a prop or physically 'shaking' the character off.

Signposting support

Support for students

Ensure students know where they can seek further help, guidance and support. If they are worried about water safety, or other aspects of personal safety, they can always speak to a trusted adult at home or in school.

The Canal & River Trust also provides information about staying safe around water: www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/advice-for-teens

For information on the Float to Live campaign, see the RNLI website: www.rnli.org/safety/float

Support for teachers

The Canal and River Trust provides a wide range of support to schools and outreach programmes. Find out more: www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/explorers/schools

Teachers can also find out more about the *Have you got their back?* safety campaign: www.claremontcomms.com/work/canal-river-trust

And about the float to live campaign: www.rnli.org/safety/float

Additional water safety resources can also be accessed from the Royal Life Saving Society: www.rlss.org.uk/Pages/Category/water-safety-education

Note that this website includes resources which do not hold the PSHE Association Quality Mark; always check the suitability of a resource for your students before using them.

Appendix: Links to the Programme of Study and DfE's statutory guidance on Relationships, Sex and Health education

Learning objective and outcomes PSHE

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

Association Programme of Study

H30. how to identify risk and manage personal safety in increasingly independent situations...

H31. ways of assessing and reducing risk in relation to... personal safety

R42. to recognise peer influence and to develop strategies for managing it...

R43. the role peers can play in supporting one another to resist pressure and influence, challenge harmful social norms and access appropriate support

R44. that the need for peer approval can generate feelings of pressure and lead to increased risk-taking; strategies to manage this

DfE RSHE statutory guidance

Respectful Relationships

practical steps they can take in a range of different contexts to improve or support respectful relationships.