

Water Safety Activity Pack

Educator Notes

Key Stage 2



Learning Objective:

Understand and apply water safety knowledge and make safe decisions.

Activities

Lesson 1: Understanding Risk

Learn about hazards and risks around water and how these can change.

Lesson 2: Different Water Environments

Understand that rivers, canals, lakes and seas have different types of hazards.

Lesson 3: Cold Water Shock

Learn how the body reacts to cold water.

Lesson 4: Float to Live

Understand that floating can increase survival chances after falling into water.

Lesson 5: Emergency Response

Learn the best response to an inland water emergency situation.

Lesson 6: Making Safe Decisions

Plan a safe visit to an inland water environment.

This resource is aligned with:

- [National Water Safety and Swimming Education Pathway](#)
- [RSHE KS2 curriculum expectations \(personal safety\)](#)
- Water Safety Code messaging

1. Stop and Think

- What are the dangers?
- What has changed (weather, depth, current)?
- Is this a safe place to be?

2. Stay Together

- Always go with a trusted grown-up.
- Always tell someone where you are going.
- Never go near water alone.

3. Float

- If you fall in: lie on your back, gently move your arms and legs and tilt your head back so your ears are submerged.
- Stay calm and control your breathing.

4. Call 999

- Get help immediately.
- Do not enter the water to rescue someone.
- Shout and signal for help.



1 Stop and Think

2 Stay Together

3 Float

4 Call 999



Explorers

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Lesson 1: Understanding Risk



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Lesson 1 Understanding Risk

The waterside can be a great place to go with our family and friends. We can have fun and stay safe.

Why might a river or canal be more dangerous than a swimming pool?

What makes water dangerous?

How might hazards or risks change?

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Ask children to think about why we enjoy being near water, then introduce the idea that water can also present risks that are not always obvious.

- Rivers and canals can be deep, cold or fast-flowing.
- There may be slippery, steep or uneven edges.
- There may be hidden obstacles or debris in the water.
- Swimming pools are designed for swimming, with controlled conditions, clear boundaries and lifeguards.

Introduce the idea that risk can change depending on weather, water conditions, time of year, location and what people are doing.

Key message: Water can be dangerous, even when it looks safe. Risks can change depending on the place, conditions and what we are doing.

Lesson 1

Can you spot the hazards?

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If possible arrange children into groups. Print the slide and mount onto larger paper. Children could circle hazards and make notes on the side. Ask children to spot the hazards in this image. What could people be doing differently to reduce the risk of harm?

Some to look out for:

- Person not looking where they are going (on the phone).
- Cycling too fast on the towpath.
- People standing too close to the edge, getting their photo taken.
- Skateboarding next to the canal.

Ask children to spot anybody behaving sensibly (canoeist with life vests).

Lesson 1 Understanding Risk

A hazard is something that could cause harm.
Risk is the chance of something bad happening.

Hazard	What might happen?	Risk (high, medium or low)	How could the risk be reduced?
Running along the edge of a canal on a wet day.	Might slip on wet grass and fall into the canal.		
Playing with a ball along the towpath.			
Swimming in a canal on a hot day.			
Swinging on a rope swing over a river.			
Leaning over the wall of a canal lock.			

Complete the hazards table.
Think about ways to avoid or reduce the risk.

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Introduce the two key words and explain that they are linked but mean different things.

A **hazard** is something that could cause harm.

Risk is the chance of that harm happening (Risk can change due to changes in human behaviour or environmental conditions like the weather).

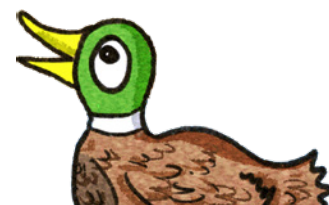
Example: A slippery canal edge is a hazard.

Running near the edge increases the risk of slipping into the water.

Tip: Print the slide, ask children to work in groups to complete the table.

Hazard	What might happen?	Risk (high, medium or low)	How could the risk be reduced?
Running along the edge of a canal on a wet day.	Might slip on wet grass and fall into the canal.	High	Walk, don't run, and stay away from the edge.
Playing with a ball along the towpath.	Might get too close to the edge and fall in.	Medium	Play in a safe open space away from the water.
Swimming in a canal on a hot day.	Might pick up germs, get cold water shock, caught on something under the surface.	High	Never swim in a canal, swim in a safer place like a leisure centre swimming pool.
Swinging on a rope swing over a river.	The rope could break or person could fall off into the water.	High	Ask an adult to set up a swing away from the water in a safe space or play in a park.
Leaning over the wall of a canal lock.	Might lose balance and fall into the water.	High	Never lean over steep walls or bridges, look from a safe distance.

Lesson 2: Different Water Environments



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Lesson 2 Water Environments

Can you describe what the water is like in these environments?

River Canal Lake Sea

These are all wonderful places to visit. Are any of these safe places to swim? How are the hazards and risks different for environment?

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Check that children recognise the four water environments. Explain that canals are man-made waterways first built to transport goods and cargo. They are now mostly used for hobby activities like bike-riding, boating and fishing. They are all great places to have fun if we act safely.

River: Fast-flowing water, changing currents and uneven or slippery banks can make rivers dangerous.

Canal: Deep, cold water and steep or slippery edges can make canals dangerous.

Lake: Lakes can be very deep, with cold water and hidden hazards beneath the surface.

Sea: Waves, tides and strong currents can quickly change the conditions and make the sea dangerous.

Key message: A swimming pool is the safest place to swim.

Lesson 2 Scenario Challenge

For each water scenario, stop, think and discuss...

1. What might the hazards be?
2. What could change the level of risk?
3. What would be the safest action to take?
4. What extra information would be useful?

Conditions such as the weather or time of day can affect the risks in different environments.

Scenario 1
You're walking beside a river after several days of heavy rain.

Scenario 2
You're visiting a lake on a hot summer day. The water looks calm and you're with your friends.

Scenario 3
You're walking along an overgrown stretch of canal towpath during the evening.

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Use each scenario to encourage children to identify hazards, consider how the risk might change, and make a safe decision. There may be more than one correct answer (split children into groups if possible).

Scenario 1 – River after heavy rain

Hazards: Fast or rising water, strong currents, flooded banks, slippery ground and hidden obstacles.

Risk could increase: After prolonged or heavy rainfall, or if water levels are still rising.

Safest action: Keep away from the edge and follow warnings or signs.

Useful information: Weather forecast, river conditions, flood warnings and whether the path is open.

Scenario 2 – Lake on a hot summer day

Hazards: Deep or cold water, hidden obstacles, steep/slippery banks and the temptation to swim.

Risk could increase: If children enter the water, swim outside a designated area or are unsupervised.

Safest action: Stay with the group and only swim where swimming is permitted and supervised.

Useful information: Is swimming allowed? Are there lifeguards, warning signs or designated swimming areas?

Scenario 3 – Overgrown canal towpath in the evening

Hazards: Poor visibility, uneven or slippery ground, hidden obstacles and an unseen water's edge.

Risk could increase: As it gets darker, visibility decreases and the path becomes harder to navigate.

Safest action: Stay together, use a well-lit route where possible and keep away from the water's edge.

Useful information: Lighting, path condition, weather, local advice and whether the route is suitable after dark.

Key message: Stop, think about what could change the risk, then choose the safest action.

Lesson 3: Cold Water Shock



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Lesson 3 Cold Water Shock

Cold water shock is the body's natural response when you suddenly enter cold water. The body can react very quickly...



Breathing: You may suddenly gasp or start breathing very quickly.
Movement: Your muscles can become tense and it can become harder to move normally.
Heart: Your heart rate can increase.
Thinking: You may feel frightened or confused, making it harder to think clearly.

You can get cold water shock even on a hot day!

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Important: Reinforce that cold water shock can happen even on a warm, sunny day because rivers, canals, lakes and the sea can remain very cold.

Activity: Prepare two bowls: one with lukewarm water and one with cold water (use ice cubes). Children can predict what might happen when different materials are placed into each. Try materials such as:
Elastic band – does it feel or behave differently when cold?
Sponge – does temperature affect how it feels?
Balloon – does it change size or feel different?
Modelling clay – does it become harder or softer?

Ask children: "What changed? Why might temperature affect how something behaves?"

Lesson 3 Cold Water Shock

If you unexpectedly enter cold water, trying to control your breathing can help you stay calm and make better decisions.

Practise breath control



Even strong swimmers can get cold water shock.

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Emphasise that strong swimmers can get cold water shock in just the same way as anybody else.

Run a breathwork experiment in the classroom or playground:

At rest: Sit completely still for one minute. Breathe in deeply, imagine smelling a beautiful rose. Breathe out slowly, imagine you are slowly blowing out a candle. Find your pulse on your wrist or neck (this might take a while so be patient). Count the beats for 30 seconds and multiply by two to get your resting beats per minute (bpm).

Get active: Do two minutes of energetic exercise (imagine you are thrashing around in cold water or swimming really hard). Stop and immediately find your pulse again. Count for 30 seconds and multiply by two. Notice how much higher the number is!

Lesson 4: Float to Live



Educator notes:

Lesson 4 Float to Live

What can happen to your body when you suddenly enter cold water?

- Gasping
- Rapid breathing
- Fast heart rate
- Tense muscles
- Difficulty moving normally

Floating can help you to get these feelings under control.

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Remind children that floating can help you to get these feelings under control. Explain that cold water can cause a sudden, automatic reaction. Gasping, rapid breathing and tense muscles can make it difficult to swim or think clearly.

Ask: "If your body is panicking, what might happen if you try to swim hard straight away?" Encourage answers such as becoming tired quickly, swallowing water or struggling to control breathing.

Lesson 4 Float to Live

If you unexpectedly enter water, don't panic. Roll onto your back and try to float.

Tilt your head back. Don't worry if your ears go under the water. Try to relax. Control your breathing. Move your hands and legs. Gentle movement will help you stay afloat. Don't worry if your legs sink. Call for help. Once you've gained control, raise your arm and call for help or swim to safety if you're able to.

Practise the position on dry land.

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Introduce the four steps as a simple sequence.

Make it interactive: Practise the sequence together using actions. Children could lie down (on dry land), tip their heads back and practise slow breathing. Emphasise that floating is not about staying perfectly still – small movements may be needed to maintain the position. Everybody can float, it just might look different for each of us.

Key message: Float first. Get your breathing under control, call for help, then think about what to do next.

Lesson 4 Float to Live - Scenarios

Sam is walking beside a canal when she slips and falls into the water. The water is cold. Sam is frightened and starts thrashing around.

What might happen if Sam continues to panic?

What could Sam try instead?

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Ask children to imagine how Sam might feel when she suddenly enters cold water. What might happen if she continues to panic?

- She may breathe very quickly or gasp.
- She may swallow water.
- Thrashing could make her tired.
- She may find it harder to think clearly or make safe decisions.

What could Sam try instead? Encourage children to identify the Float to Live sequence: stop thrashing, try to float on her back, control her breathing and call for help. Give small groups the scenario and ask them to freeze-frame two moments in the situation. Discuss what has changed and how the level of risk may have increased or decreased.

Key message: Cold water make you panic or go into shock, floating can give you time to regain control.

Lesson 4 Float to Live - Scenarios

You are walking beside a river when you accidentally slip and fall into deep, cold water. The water is moving fast.

Should you swim against the current?

What is the most important thing to do?

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Ask children: "Should you swim against the current?" Discuss why this could be dangerous. A strong current can make swimming against it very tiring, quickly using up energy without necessarily moving you to safety. Floating gives you time to control your breathing and decide what to do next.

Ask: "What could happen if you use all your energy fighting the current?" "What might help you stay calm?" "Who could you call or signal to?"

Be careful not to suggest that children should deliberately swim with a current. The focus is on floating, getting control of breathing, attracting help and then making a safe decision.

Key message: Don't fight a strong current. Float, control your breathing, call for help and think about the safest next step.

Lesson 5: Emergency Response



Educator notes:

Lesson 5 Emergency Response

You are walking beside a canal with a friend. You see someone in the water shouting for help. What would you do?



Remind children that the important thing is to stay calm and get help.

Explain that rescuing someone from the water is dangerous, and the priority is to get professional help without putting yourself at risk. Even a strong swimmer should never enter open water to attempt a rescue.

Lesson 5 Emergency Response

Never enter the water to try to rescue someone – Even if you are a strong swimmer. You could put yourself in danger too.

- Stay calm. Always think before you act.
- Shout for help as loudly as you can.
- Dial 999 and ask for the Fire & Rescue Service. Describe your location clearly.
- Encourage the person to float on their back.
- Throw a safety line or rope to them if you can. Or, look for something that floats, such as a ball or plastic bottle, to help support them while waiting for emergency services to arrive.



Talk through the actions. Explain that life rings and throw lines are housed in stations next to some towpaths. Follow the instructions on the board to access them and use them. Throw the items next to the person rather than at them.

Practise a short role-play, with one child as the person in trouble and another calling for help from a safe distance.

Key message: Never go in. Call for help and help from a safe distance.

Lesson 5 Emergency Response



How might you describe the location to an emergency responder?

Ideas might include:

- Call for help; get the attention of some grown-ups.
- Encourage the person to float.
- Call 999 or ask someone else to call 999.

See if children can spot anything that could be used as a flotation aid. When you call 999 you will need to tell the emergency responder on the phone what's happened and where you are. Look out for key landmarks even if you don't know exactly where you are. Bridges/locks usually have numbers on them. Buildings often have signs. Use a role-play activity to practise making the call.



Ask: "What are people doing to help in this emergency?"

- Shouting for help and calling 999.
- Telling the person in the water to float.
- Other people are keeping away from the edge.

Ask: "What else could they do?"

- Use the life ring.
- Use the throwline.
- Use the ball or bottle of water to help the person stay afloat.
- Ask the boat driver for a life vest.

Lesson 5 Emergency Response

Which person is giving the most sensible advice to someone who has fallen into a cold river?

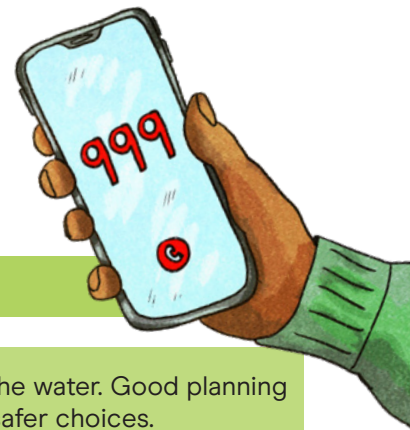


The best response is 3. "Stay calm. Lie back and float while we think!"

Remind children never to risk their own lives to rescue someone; always get help, even if you are a good swimmer.

Attempting to swim as soon as you fall in could be dangerous. Your body might go into cold water shock.

Lesson 6: Making Safe Decisions



Educator notes:

Lesson 6 Making Safe Decisions

Being water safe isn't just about knowing what to do when something goes wrong. We can reduce risk by thinking ahead.



Explain that water safety starts before we reach the water. Good planning can help us spot hazards, reduce risks and make safer choices.

Ask children to work in small groups and brainstorm questions they should ask before setting off.

Possible questions:

- Where are we going and how will we get there?
- What will the weather and water conditions be like?
- Where are the safe places to stop?
- What hazards might we encounter?
- Who will we go with and who knows where we are?

Make it interactive: Give each group a few minutes to create their own "water safety checklist", then compare answers.

Key message: Think ahead, spot the risks and plan how to stay safe.

Lesson 6 Making Safe Decisions



Use the map to challenge children to plan a fun, interesting route. Ask groups to agree on their choices and explain why. You may suggest a start and end point or allow children to decide.

Prompt children to consider:

- **Route:** Which paths keep them away from the water's edge?
- **Picnic:** Where is a safe, dry place well away from the water?
- **Extra care:** Where are there bridges, locks, steep edges, narrow paths or other hazards?
- **Risks:** What could make a particular area more dangerous?
- **Reducing risk:** How could they change their route or behaviour?
- **Meeting point:** Where could everyone safely regroup if separated?
- **Emergency location:** What bridges, locks, signs, buildings or other landmarks could help describe where they are?
- **Changing conditions:** How might rain, darkness, ice, strong winds or rising water change the risks? How could they prepare for this?

Have groups present their route and challenge them to explain

Key message: A fun, safe trip starts with a good plan. Think about the hazards, the conditions and what you can do to reduce risk.

Lesson 6 Making Safe Decisions



Possible answers:

- Weather-appropriate clothing and suitable footwear
- Drinking water
- Sun hat and sunscreen
- Fully charged mobile phone (carried by a responsible adult)
- First-aid kit
- Map or information about the route
- Torch if there is a risk of getting caught out after dark
- Binoculars or a notebook for spotting wildlife

Ask: "Why have you chosen each item? Does it help us have fun, stay comfortable or reduce a risk?"

Make it interactive: Give groups a selection of items, including some useful and some unnecessary items. Ask them to choose what they would pack and justify their decisions.