Water Safety Tips
April 2022

On average, around 96 people lose their life in Scotland's waters every year. While it is important for everyone to be aware of the risk in relation to water, educating our children and young people at an early age is a key priority.

Parents play an important role in helping to educate their children about water safety. The top tips below are designed to help everyone stay safe and enjoy Scotland's waters.

Tip #1: Talk to your child about water safety

Your child may learn about water safety at school. If they go to a youth group like Cubs or Brownies they may learn about water safety there. But to keep them safe, it is important for you talk to them about it too.

Here are the main things you all should know – the Water Safety Code:

1. Stop and think – spot the dangers.
2. Stay together, stay close.
3. In an emergency, call 999.

Tip #2: Remember that swimming in open water is not the same as swimming in a swimming pool

Even if your child is a confident swimmer, it is important that they realise that swimming in open water, like a loch, lake, river or the sea, is not the same as swimming in a swimming pool. Here are the reasons why:

- Open water is moving and could carry you away, even if you are a strong swimmer.
- Open water can be deeper and colder than you think.
- There might be hidden dangers under the water, like rocks or rubbish.
- The edge of open water can also be dangerous – you may slip or be swept in by a wave.

Hidden Hazards in Water with Olympic Athlete Duncan Scott - YouTube

Tip #3: Practise floating

If you fall into open water, your immediate reaction may well be to panic but this does not help. The best thing to do is lie on your back and float with your arms and legs spread out like a starfish. This gives you a chance to calm down, catch your breath, and get used to the temperature of the water.

Because floating does not always come naturally, it is a really good idea to practise with your child when you go swimming. Here is what to do:

- Lean back to keep your mouth and nose out of the water.
- Push your belly up and spread out your arms and legs in a star shape.
- Gently move your hands and feet to help you float.

If your child is learning to swim they may have practised this already, and may be able to give you some tips!

Tip #4: Be prepared

If you are heading out for a day by the sea or a loch, lake or river, make sure you are prepared for the day:

- Check the weather forecast and only go if the weather is looking good for what you have planned.
- Pack sunscreen, drinking water and a phone with plenty of charge so that you can call for help if anything goes wrong.
- Pick a safe spot to visit, for example, a beach that has a lifeguard(s). You can find your nearest lifeguarded beach on the RNLI website.
- When you arrive, read any warning signs carefully and follow any instructions about where, or where not, to go into the water to swim.

Tip #5: Leave inflatable toys at home

Leave inflatable toys at home and save them for the paddling pool or swimming pool. They can be dangerous in open water as they can carry you out further than you can swim. Additionally, inflatable toys are not designed for use at sea and may burst, leaving you stranded.

Tip #6: Stay together

If you are having a day out by the water, stay together. Make sure you know where everyone is at all times and that someone is always watching from the shore if other people are in the water. That way, if anyone gets into trouble, you will be able to call for help straightaway.

Tip #7: Know what to do if you get into trouble in the water

Make sure the whole family knows what to do if they get into trouble in the water:

- Keep calm and do not swim hard.
- Hold onto anything near you that floats.
- Float like a starfish (see Tip #3 above) until you feel more relaxed.
- When you can control your breathing, raise your hand and call for help or swim to shore.

Tip #8: Know what to do if you see someone else in trouble in the water

If you see anyone else in trouble in the water, do not go in and try to help them. You might end up in trouble too. Instead you should always:

- Call the fire brigade on 999 if you are inland, for example by a river, lake or loch.
- Call the coastguard on 112 if you are by the sea.

Once you have called for help you should:

- Stay back from the edge and do not go into the water.
- Look for anything you can throw to help them float.
- Keep watch until help arrives.

Tip #9: Do not mix water and alcohol

Make sure older children know that open water and alcohol can be a dangerous mix. Alcohol (and drugs) can seriously impair your judgement, reactions and ability to swim.

Learning to swim

One of the best ways to stay safe around water is to know how to swim. But this is only one of the benefits of swimming, for children and adults alike. Swimming is good for the heart and muscles. Unlike many other sports, it is easy on the joints. It is also great for clearing your head and boosting health and wellbeing. Additionally, swimming at your local pool is a great way to spend time together as a family.

When can my child start swimming?

Your child can start swimming at any age – even new-born babies can have swimming lessons!

What are the benefits of learning to swim as a baby?

There are lots of reasons to start swimming early. Swimming helps to boost your baby's development and may help them sleep better. It is great for bonding too.

You can ask about baby swimming classes at your local swimming pool.