



**Canal &
River Trust**

Making life better by water

Find out about...

Water Safety



canalrivertrust.org.uk

Taking care by water

At the Canal & River Trust we believe life is better by water. Whether it's walking the dog, exercising or just looking for a place to relax, being next to our waterways can make you healthier and happier.

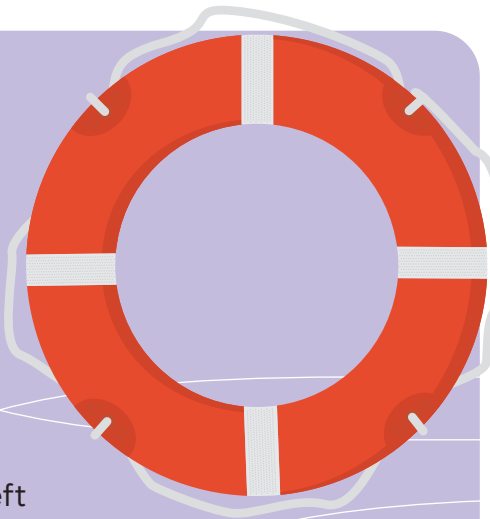
As the charity that looks after over 2,000 miles of canals and rivers, we encourage everyone to enjoy these amazing spaces – safely. With every season we urge everyone visiting our waterways to be careful and stay safe around water.

Take a look at these facts and you'll see why water safety is something we care so much about.



Accidents around water: Some facts

- Every year, in the UK, around 400 people die from drowning as a result of an accident in or around water.
- Thousands of others are left with severe, life-changing injuries.
- Search, rescue and emergency services respond to over 100,000 water-related events each year.
- Some of these deaths and injuries are the result of risky activities such as 'tombstoning' and gathering in groups to swim in locks or reservoirs but many are the result of simple accidents.
- Around 50% of people who die never intended to go in the water.
- Drowning is the third most common death in young people. The risk increases significantly from age 15.



About this pack

It's important to us that everyone visiting our waterways knows how to enjoy them safely.

This pack will help you **Learn** how to help and what to do in emergency situations, to manage risks, become more competent near to different types of water, across all seasons, and to keep yourself and others safe. There are useful demonstrations, real life stories and other information for you to **Watch and Read**, as well as a host of things to **Create and Do** (on your own, with friends or in the wider community), to explore the behaviour of water and uncover interesting facts to share with your family, friends or the wider community.

We know that young people respond and listen best to volunteers that are closer to their own age. We can help you take your **Next Steps** to help deliver water safety messages to others, particularly younger children.



Make a positive difference

Social action, skills development and employability and health and wellbeing are the three key strands of our youth engagement work. Every year, more and more young people are giving their time to the Trust and making a positive difference in their community.

Visit our [Youth Engagement pages](https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/youth-engagement) to see the range of projects and activities on offer and find out how you can get involved.
canalrivertrust.org.uk/youth-engagement

Why is water safety so important?

You may have learned about water safety in primary school and you may well be a strong swimmer, but as you get older, become more independent and start to socialise more with friends, it's even more important to be aware of how to stay safe near water.

Water can be dangerous no matter how strong a swimmer you are. It's very easy to misjudge the effects cold water can have on your body – being a strong swimmer may not save you if you fall into cold water.

Being aware of everyday risks in, on and around water and knowing how to behave could save your life. You never know when you might unexpectedly need this knowledge.

In fact runners, walkers and cyclists are the group most likely to accidentally end up in the water due to slipping or tripping up on wet or icy surfaces. In contrast, the risk is very low when taking part in organised water sports, such as kayaking, canoeing or paddleboarding.



Delivering a water safety message to everyone

We work hard to make sure everyone knows how to behave safely near water. We partner with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA), Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) and Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS) to deliver important messages about water safety. And we are a key member of the National Water Safety Forum, which is responsible for drawing up the UK's National Drowning Prevention Strategy.

An important part of this work is to highlight the dangers associated with walking next to water, particularly at night, and to encourage young people to find a different route home.

Working together means messages are clear, consistent, and memorable; and supports the Trust's broader mission as a waterways and wellbeing charity.



Learn: about unseen dangers

From the safety of a canal bank, water can look extremely inviting. But every year young people get into trouble as a result of dangers they cannot see.

With many stretches of canals and rivers being unsupervised, it's extremely important to know about these dangers for our own and others safety.

It's also possible to end up in the water when you didn't intend to! Around 50% of people who lose their lives each year never intended to go in the water.

There are many warning signs around reservoirs, canals and rivers to help you stay safe. We all need to obey these rules because they apply to all of us.



Be aware!

- Low water temperatures can cause the body to go into 'cold water shock' and can claim your life in minutes, even if you are a strong swimmer
- It's difficult to estimate the depth of the water. It may be much deeper or shallower than expected and cause serious harm if jumping in
- There are often no suitable places to get out of the water due to steep slimy banks
- The ground shelves away very steeply so you can quickly become out of your depth
- There is no way of knowing what lies beneath
- Reeds and other plant life can get tangled around your limbs and keep you in the water
- Mud makes it difficult to walk even if you can stand up
- Litter and waste such as pipes, shopping trolleys, sharp metal or broken bottles can trap your feet as well as cause injury
- There may be underwater machinery to help operate the locks, for example sluices
- Swimming in open water can expose you to serious disease such as Leptospirosis (Weil's disease)
- There may be hidden currents. Flowing water can be especially dangerous and when the locks are in operation the water flows extremely fast

How to fight 'cold water shock'

Low water temperatures cause the body to go into 'cold water shock' and even hypothermia. It reacts to the cold water by drawing the blood away from muscles to protect the organs and making it difficult to move limbs. Eventually the body slows down and gradually loses consciousness, which can lead to drowning.

You need to fight your instincts.

If you were to fall into cold water you are likely to be confused and frightened and your natural instinct will be to fight the water – to swim hard. But the cold water will make you gasp uncontrollably, your heart will beat really fast, you'll lose energy quickly and breathe in lots of water, and eventually your muscles will become paralysed.

Instead, if you float on your back you can keep your airways clear, control your breathing and allow the cold water shock to pass. Then you can call out for help and you will have a much better chance of surviving.

Create & Do

So many people are unaware of the unseen dangers found on, in and around water. Here are some creative project ideas which are fun and challenging to do, but will also help to spread important messages about water safety.

Pictures speak louder than words

Poster or infographic

At the Trust we try to develop simple, memorable messages such as SAFE (Stay Away From the Edge) and our Water Safety Code for young children encourages them to learn:

- Spot the dangers!
- Take safety advice!
- Go together!
- Learn how to help!

Why not design a poster or infographic that teaches young people about the importance of staying safe around water, and the actions they can take. You could focus on one specific danger, a particular type of waterway, or communicate a broader message about the unseen dangers across a series of posters.

Try to do some research to uncover lots of interesting facts and figures that you might like to include. What will make your poster stand out?

Why not share your poster designs with friends or ask your

teachers or youth group leaders if they would be happy to display them? We'd love to see all your ideas. Please share them with us via social media or email – all details are provided at the end of this pack.

Presentation

You may even want to pull all your research and ideas into a presentation on hidden dangers, which could be delivered in an assembly, tutor/form time, or during a youth group session – either remotely or in person.

- Treat each page or slide in your presentation as a poster. This will help you think about delivering information simply and clearly – you can include a different message on each slide.
- Just like posters, a presentation will be more engaging if you include lots of images, interesting facts and infographics – and even challenge others to get involved.



Create a video, vlog or blog

Making a video is a great way to get your voice heard. You could produce a single informative video or create a vlog and post a series of short videos to explore different elements of water safety over a period of time. If you're thinking of creating a vlog, think about inviting other people to get involved and share their thoughts, experiences and ideas about staying safe.

Everything you need to know about making a video or vlog and all the equipment you will need is included on the [worksheet](#).

If you don't want to make a video, you could always write a blog instead. Remember to think of a different theme or angle for each of your posts, and include pictures, diagrams, drawings and photos too.



Download our activity sheets at canalrivertrust.org.uk/youth-resources

Create & Do continued

Help us to deliver water safety messages

The Trust produces lots of information for younger children to help them learn about water safety. One of the best ways to do this is to use pictures. Here are some examples of posters we use to help children identify dangers. We'd love to hear how you might use these to teach others important water safety messages.

Or you may like to come up with an idea of your own? We've included a [worksheet](#) to help you plan a water safety themed task for others. We'd love to see your ideas – find out about all the different ways to get in touch at the end of this pack.

Think about:

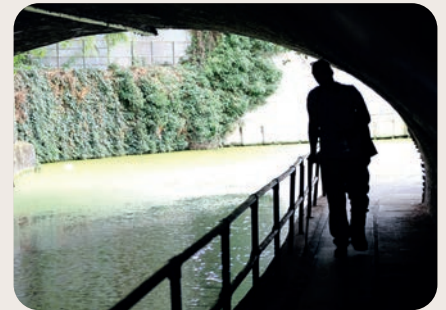
- **When** you first learnt about water safety
- **Which** were the things that helped you learn the most?
- **What** techniques do you use when you are revising or need to learn important information?
- **How** would you tell your friends about the importance of water safety?
- **How** would your favourite youth leader teach you something new?
- **How** could you deliver this task on your own, with your peers, or together with a youth leader?



Real Life stories

The following videos include real life stories of people who have been involved in or lost loved ones. This content is upsetting, so we encourage everyone to prepare themselves emotionally before proceeding. If you believe that the videos may be traumatising for you, then you may choose not to view these particular links or ask a parent / group leader to watch them first.

- When Evan got caught in a rip current, he started to panic. But then he remembered what he needed to do. Watch Evan's story – youtube.com/watch?v=WMuCyARIZ98
- Mel Goodship's 17 year old son James drowned in June 2014 while swimming with friends in Foulridge Reservoir



in Lancashire. Hear her talk about James' story and the events of a tragic day – canalrivertrust.org.uk/james-story

- Charlie Pope was 19 when he died on a night out in Manchester. Hear Charlie Pope's story – youtube.com/watch?v=ZwE-lAwi-Dk. When you're on a night out, please look out for one another. #CharliesCode If you go out together, stay together, and take a route home away from the water.

Watch & Read

Find out more about staying safe near water with this video on the hidden dangers:

youtube.com/watch?v=Mhxa8TsRMvw

Watch the Be water aware video:

youtube.com/watch?v=kBaBie_8Z3o

Read the RoSPA Water Safety Code and be safe by water:

rospa.com/leisure-safety/water/advice/children-young-people

Learn: about staying safe all year round

Whatever the weather, whatever the season, you need to be aware of and learn to manage the risks of being around water.

Staying safe in summer

Outdoor swimming and dipping seem very appealing, particularly on a hot day. Open water can look very inviting but even in summer the water in canals and reservoirs is extremely cold.

You may be fit and strong on land but you can still get into trouble in cold water if you take risks or do not know what to do if you get into trouble.

- Learn how to stay safe in water – although you can't train your body to deal with 'cold water shock', you can learn how to overcome it and keep yourself safe.
- There are lots of activities and water sports to enjoy on the water as part of a club or organised group, or with an experienced adult as a guide.
- Look out for signs that indicate danger. Never swim



in locks, docks or reservoirs, places where there are lots of boats, or in fast moving water.

- Never go alone and know how to get help if needed.
- Spending time by water makes us happier and healthier – you could always cool down with a drink, ice

cream, or by sitting in the shade of the trees instead!

The Open Water section on page 11 of this pack gives more information on safe places to swim outdoors and we've included a link to a video giving tips for cold water dips at the end of this section.





Staying safe in winter

The surfaces around canals can get slippery and icy in the cold, and the temperature of the water can be close to freezing under an icy surface so make sure you understand the risks and know what to do in an emergency.

You can still enjoy canoeing and kayaking in winter but make sure you have spare clothes, food and a thermos with you. And whether you are on the water or enjoying a walk on the towpath make sure you are always prepared.



- Plan your journey to start and finish in daylight, but carry a torch just in case.
- Stick to well-lit areas or walk further away from the water if you are walking later in the day.
- Don't go alone.
- Check the weather and wear the right clothing – waterproofs, sturdy footwear and warm layers.
- Take your phone to call for help if you get into trouble, or if you see somebody else in trouble.

Don't Drink and Drown

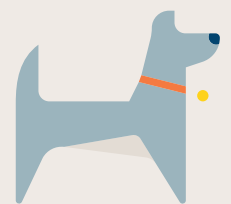
Whatever the time of year, if you have been out with friends in the evening (particularly if anyone has been drinking alcohol) make sure you walk home together, take a safe route home and stay away from the water.

What to do if someone gets into danger

One of the most important things you can do is learn what to do if someone needs help. Never get into the water, even if you are a strong swimmer. Instead:

- **Stay calm.** Always think before you act.
- There may be other people around, so **shout for help** as loudly as you can.
- **Dial 999** and ask for the fire and rescue service. Explain your location clearly – use road names, bridge numbers and describe 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 you can, **throw a safety line** or rope to them. Otherwise lie down to make yourself more stable and use a tree branch, stick or an item of clothing to reach out to them.

Dogs enjoy spending time by the water just as much as we do – but they can be



equally tempted to jump in for a swim! Make sure you keep them on a short lead along the towpath. If your dog does go into the water, don't jump in after it. Instead, encourage your dog to swim to where you can lift it out more safely. If this isn't possible, try to reach them with a line or a long branch and call for help.

Create & Do

Create your own water safety game

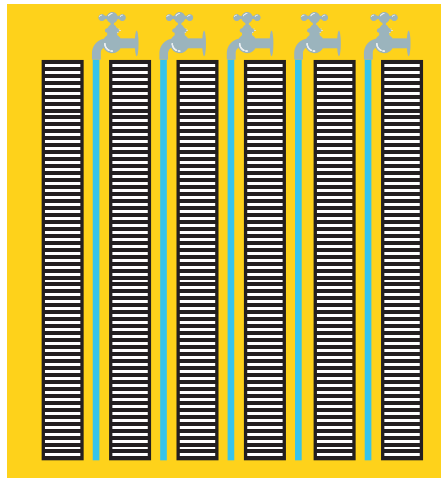
Games and quizzes are a great way to have fun, whilst learning about water safety.

Use the [worksheet](#) to help you create a game or quiz that other people can get involved in. Think about the games you enjoy playing when deciding what type of game to create – perhaps your water safety game or quiz could be based on one of your favourites?

Maybe it's a watery version of Monopoly where the streets are replaced by canals and rivers; a Cluedo-style 'Canaldo' game, where you have to correctly guess the person, location of accident and how the person was saved; or a card game such as Top Trumps.



Download our activity sheets at canalrivertrust.org.uk/youth-resources



Watery illusions

Water in our canals and rivers can be hiding many dangers. Take a look at these watery illusions to see some of the other tricks water can play on us.

Look closely at this image – are the blue lines twisting and 'flowing' like water?

And create this illusion for yourself:

Draw an arrow facing left or right on a piece of card and place it behind an empty glass. Fill the glass with water and watch the arrow change direction.



Write a letter

Are you concerned about safety around your local waterway? Do you have ideas for safety measures or better signage that could be put into action? We'd love to hear your thoughts, but you could also think about writing to someone with a lot of power or influence. If they were to get involved with your ideas for action, it could help spread the message to even more people.

Think about writing to someone important to take part in your action. It could be your local MP, a local celebrity or your District or County Commissioner. Use the letter [template](#) to invite them to help.

Address line 1
Address Line 2
City
Postcode

(Today's date)

Dear _____

My name is _____ and I am part of...
(include details of school / group etc. if applicable)

I've been working on a water safety project at our local waterway / canal / river in (location)

We visited the waterway and ...
(Talk about some of the things you did during your waterway visit, and what you learned from your detective work)

Now we're going to take action and try to make our local area better. Here's how we're going to do it:...

We would like you to help us by ...
(Think carefully about what you ask this person to do, for example coming to your event or writing about you on social media)

(Explain how their actions could help you with your project)

We hope you will consider helping with our project.

Yours sincerely/faithfully,
(Signature)
Your name



Create & Do continued



Canal junk modelling

You'd be amazed at the unusual things that are discarded into our canals. Bikes, laptops, mobile phones, clothes, even a sofa, have all been uncovered in the past!

Below is a list of just some of the items we have found when draining canals for maintenance and cleaning. Do you have any of these items at home?

Have a go at some junk modelling or upcycling to see what you can create.

- Plastic bottle
- Milk carton
- Empty can
- Coffee cup
- Inner tube from bike
- Broken umbrella
- Plastic bags
- Paint pot
- Old clothes
- Broken ladders

Download our activity sheets at canalrivertrust.org.uk/youth-resources

Or try some of these ideas

Please make sure it's ok to use the items before you start getting creative!

- Repurpose old ladders to make a great set of shelves, or use to display your favourite pictures.
- You can use old paint pots or cans to make unique plant pots – make sure they are clean and file down any sharp edges before decorating.



Did you know...

Our volunteers spend over **100,000 hours** each year clearing litter from our towpaths and canals



- Cut old t-shirts into thin strips and plait together to make friendship bracelets.
- Tie together empty plastic bottles, cover with papier maché, and paint to make a unique bedside table.

Watch & Read

Read about safety on our waterways: canalrivertrust.org.uk/watersafety

Find out about staying safe all year round: canalrivertrust.org.uk/summer-water-safety
canalrivertrust.org.uk/winter-water-safety

Watch our summer water safety video: youtube.com/watch?v=nSiUDBkTsNI

Watch the video on the hidden dangers of circulating currents: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mhxa8TsRMvw>

Learn: about open water swimming

The open waters across our network can look very inviting, particularly on a hot day when a quick swim could be the perfect way to cool down. However we strongly advise everyone to stay out of the water and only swim in places where there is licensed supervision and support, such as a lifeguard.

This advice applies no matter how good a swimmer you are. The water can hide all sorts of dangers that can put even the strongest swimmer's life in danger.

If you are keen to try open water swimming, Triathlon England can help you find your nearest club. These clubs will support you while you are swimming and can also advise you on the right gear.

beyond swim

We want everyone to enjoy our water, safely. We're working with British Triathlon and Royal Life Saving Society on a new initiative called beyond swim which will help us to create safe swimming venues across our reservoirs.

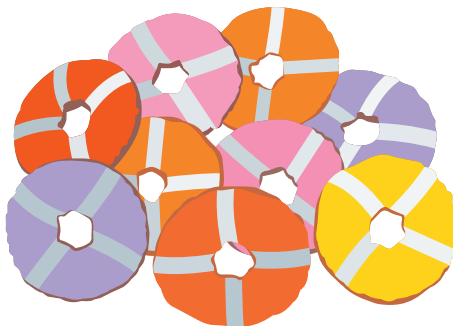
beyond swim will be an open water swimming programme that lets you swim safely thanks to the involvement of accredited open water swimming and triathlon clubs. Look out for more details on our website and in your local area.

Create & Do

Lifebouy biscuits

Lifebuoys are positioned at regular intervals along our canals and waterways in urban locations, to be used in an emergency.

The orange and white lifebuoys are the inspiration behind these water safety biscuits. They're easy to make and taste as good as they look! Follow the simple instructions on the [recipe sheet](#).



Signing off on water safety

There are many warning signs around reservoirs, canals and rivers to help you stay safe. You need to obey these rules. Take a closer look at some of the signs and see if you can understand what they are telling you. Are we missing anything important? Could we communicate water safety messages better?

Could you design a new sign, or even a flag, to warn people about dangers and encourage them to stay safe? The colour and shape of your sign will have a meaning too – check out our [worksheet](#) for more information as well as some templates to help you design your own signs.

Why not share your designs with your friends to see how effective they are – how easy is it for them to understand what you are trying to tell them? Is it easy to understand what the sign is saying from a distance? Can it be understood without words?

We'd love to see your ideas too. You can post your designs to us or share them with us via social media or email. All our contact details are included at the end of this pack.

Watch & Read

Watch the tips for cold water dips video:
[youtube.com/watch?v=7zLTW7cIFSI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7zLTW7cIFSI)

Check out the following for advice and more information about open water swimming:

swimming.org/justswim/starting-open-water-swimming/
rlss.org.uk/pages/category/open-water-safety-tips

nationalwatersafety.org.uk/advice-and-information/open-water-swimming

beyondswim.org

Find your nearest swimming club at:
britishtriathlon.org/clubs

Download our activity sheets at
canalrivertrust.org.uk/youth-resources

Next Steps

We've given you lots of information about water safety. Now you can share what you have learned with others.

Create a video or vlog

Digital media is a great place to talk about the importance of water safety and to communicate key messages that make up the water safety code. Don't forget to encourage everyone to play their part too.

Use our [worksheet](#) on producing a video or vlog to help get you started – canalrivertrust.org.uk/youth-resources

Make a poster or infographic

If there's a message you feel particularly strongly about a poster or infographic is a very powerful way to communicate this message to others.

Download our [worksheet](#) at canalrivertrust.org.uk/youth-resources

Write a letter to someone with a lot of power or influence. Use the letter template at canalrivertrust.org.uk/youth-resources to invite them to help. For more tips see page 9.

Don't forget to tag us in your social media posts and share your pictures, stories and news on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Or you can send us all your amazing ideas and creations via email or post.

 [/canalrivertrust](#)

 [@canalrivertrust](#)

 [@canalrivertrust](#)

Get involved

If you've been inspired by everything you've learned and done we'd love you to get more involved! Contact us to find out about opportunities in your local area.

And please get in touch if you are concerned about the safety around the waterways near you. We really value your support and would love to hear from you.

Always remember to keep yourself safe online at all times. Speak to your parent, carer, teacher or group leader for advice and check out this guidance from www.thinkuknow.co.uk

Bringing the magic of our waterways to you!

Our towpaths are open for you to exercise and be outdoors, closer to nature. We want you to enjoy your local canal or river, but please follow the government's advice at www.gov.uk/coronavirus on social distancing at all times. Keep your distance from both other people and moored boats, where people may be living aboard and could be self-isolating or shielding.

Events taking part on Trust land will be reviewed on a case by case basis and no event which could put both those attending or our staff and volunteers at risk will be permitted. We will continue to follow the latest government advice and will post updates if the advice changes. Please check individual event details, follow us on social media and sign-up to our email for the latest information.



Canal & River Trust

Making life better by water

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canalrivertrust.org.uk



To get involved:

visit: canalrivertrust.org.uk/volunteer

email: volunteer@canalrivertrust.org.uk

For more information on our youth & community engagement work please email lucie.unsworth@canalrivertrust.org.uk