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River Trust

Canal & River  
**explorers**

# All About Water Safety



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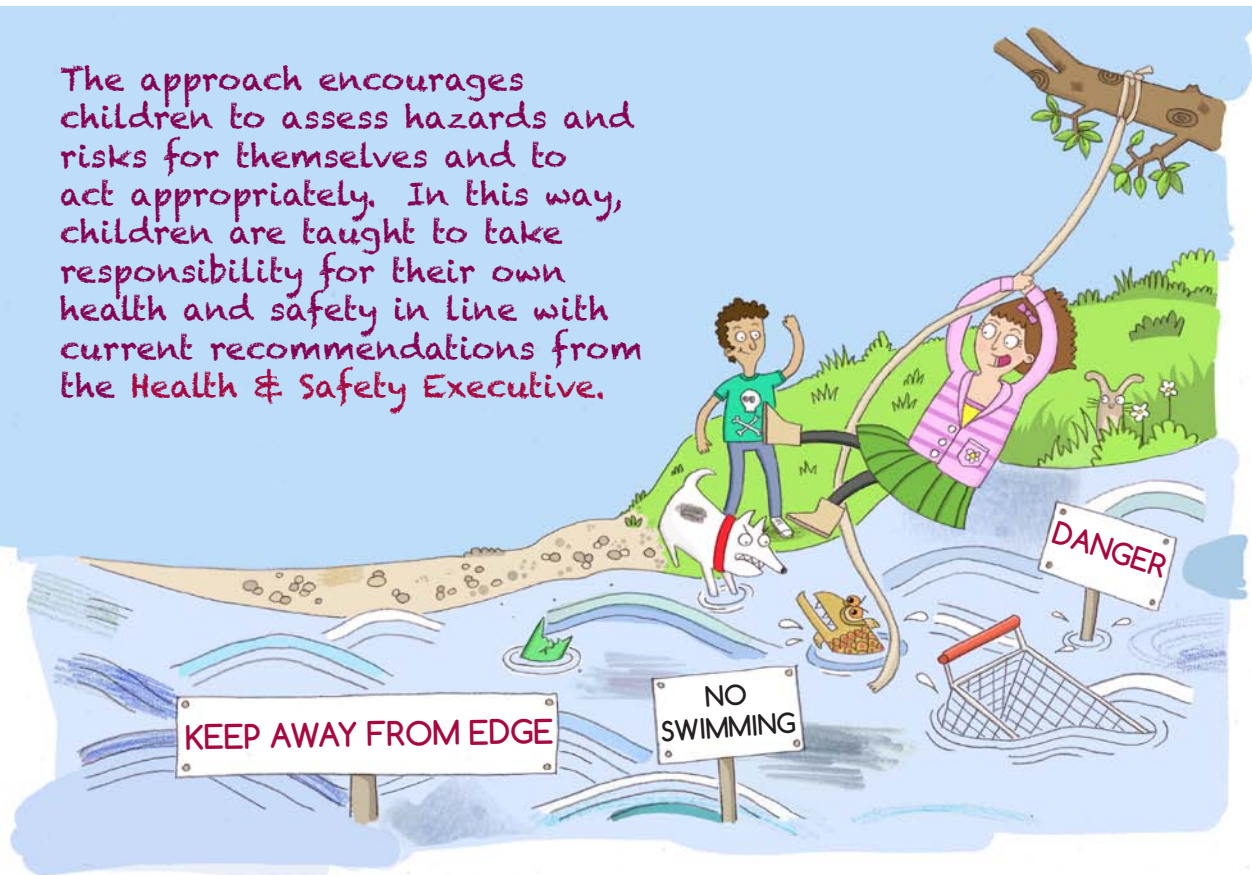
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# Introducing water safety

Visiting canals, rivers, lakes and reservoirs is a fun and rewarding activity for children and adults alike. In order to get the most from canals and rivers, it is vitally important that anyone visiting them follows some simple safety guidelines.

This pack contains four classroom-based activities designed to teach water safety to children aged 7-11. The activities, designed by experienced teachers for schools, group leaders and parents can be used either individually or as a suite. The activities can be applied equally to all canals and rivers.

The approach encourages children to assess hazards and risks for themselves and to act appropriately. In this way, children are taught to take responsibility for their own health and safety in line with current recommendations from the Health & Safety Executive.



**The key message**  
**SAFE (Stay Away From the Edge)**  
– is reinforced throughout all the activities and is the basis of the water safety education delivered in this resource.

- Discussion should include what we mean by 'edge' e.g. the edge of any place near water such as a dirt path, quayside, edge etc.
- Talk about what happens if you trip or get pushed e.g. if you're close to the edge you might fall into deep and very cold water. If you are away from the edge, you might graze your knees, but you won't drown!

## Curriculum relevance:

England: KS2 National Curriculum PHSE/Citizenship 3e  
Wales: Physical Aspect of the Personal and Social Education Framework.

Links to Cub Scout and Brownie badges: Water Safety

# The four activities are:



## 1 Hidden Dangers

**Time:** 40 minutes

**Recommended age:** 7-11 years

**Activity:** to produce a poster or presentation for a younger audience about the dangers near water that might not be immediately obvious. The key message is the importance of following the **SAFE** code of practice.

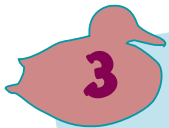


## 2 Rescue Stations

**Time:** 60 minutes

**Recommended age:** 9-11 years

**Activity:** roleplay in which groups of children consider how they might help a person in distress in the water. The emphasis is on being **SAFE** at all times, while raising the alarm and getting the person in the water to move to the edge.



## 3 Water Safety Game

**Time:** 30 minutes

**Recommended age:** 7-9 years

**Activity:** a board game in which children decide what's safe and what isn't. The game reinforces the **SAFE** message and encourages good practice in order to enjoy canals and rivers.

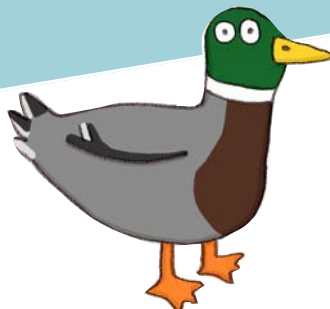


## 4 Spot the Hazards

**Time:** 40 minutes

**Recommended age:** 7-11 years

**Activity:** spotting hazards in a picture of a waterside scene. It helps to stimulate discussion about how following the **SAFE** message can lead to an enjoyable time at the waterways.





Every year the Canal & River Trust remove dumped rubbish from waterways. It's often hidden below the surface of the water and a potential hazard. This activity is designed to get children talking about such risks.

**Aim:** To make children aware of the hidden dangers under the water of canals and rivers.

**You will need:** A blindfold, plain paper and pencils.

## Activity: Stage 1

- Blindfold one of the group. Get the child to walk across a familiar room or space.
- Choose another child to call out directions as the blindfolded child heads towards obstacles e.g. furniture etc.
- Once the child has crossed the space, ask him/her how easy/difficult it was.

**Key message:** This is a familiar place, but there were still hidden dangers.

## Stage 2

Ask children to write down as many hidden dangers near water as they can. Follow-up discussion should include the following:

- **Vegetation** e.g. plants, cut grass and especially duckweed can make the surface of the water appear like solid ground.
  - **Hidden objects under the water** such as broken glass, metal and sharp rocks can lie beneath the surface.
  - **Cold water** can cause the body to shut down very quickly. This means you gasp for breath and quickly become exhausted. Your body temperature drops and you could lose consciousness. (See extension exercise 1 page 5.)
  - **Deep and untreated water** can be risky. It's quite difficult to tell how deep water is, especially in rivers. Canal and river water is not treated and may contain bacteria that can cause infection.
  - **Ice** may look thick enough to hold your weight, but you can never tell how strong it is.
  - **Hidden and slippery edges** can be dangerous. Plants can hide the edge and even where you can see it, it's easy to slip into the water.
  - **Currents** can be strong even in canals and can drag you under.
- Depending on your locality, the following may also apply:
- **Low bridges or overhanging trees** can knock cyclists off their bikes.
  - **Towpaths** can be hazardous so wear sensible shoes.
  - **Fishing rods and poles, mooring spikes/ropes, bollards, cyclists** etc. are all potential hazards on shared towpaths.
  - **Litter on the edge or towpath** could contain syringes etc. and so should be avoided.



## Extension activity 1:

Explain to children that one of the unexpected dangers is very COLD water.

**Aim:** To demonstrate the effect of cold water.

**You will need:** String, a bucket of lukewarm water and a bucket of ice cold water.

### Activity:

- Ask the children to plunge their hands in the warm water, immediately followed by the ice-cold water.
- How long can they keep their hands in the cold water? Ask the children to describe how it feels.

### Discussion points:

How it affects the rest of your body:

- You gasp. You could breathe in water which may cause you to choke.
- Your breathing rate increases. This flushes carbon dioxide out of your blood which causes cramp.
- Your heart rate increases to about 180 beats a minute. You could suffer a heart attack.
- Your blood pressure increases. You could suffer a stroke.
- Your ability to hold your breath decreases. If you go under you swallow water.
- You become exhausted after about 3 minutes.
- Your body temperature drops. You will become unconscious.
- Once your body temperature drops below 26°C you may die.



## Extension activity 2:

Explain that you are concerned that children in a younger class/younger group (e.g. Beavers and Rainbows) are not aware of the hidden dangers at the waterside. Ask your group to design a poster to explain the hidden dangers to them.

One approach could be to tackle this poster from the point of view of, 'You may have been told that...' (e.g. swimming in the canal/river/reservoir/lake is OK). This can go some way towards countering the influence of peers or even parents who might encourage unsafe behaviour through example.

### The poster must:

- Have the SAFE message written prominently.
- Clearly identify some of the hidden dangers.
- Show what type of water it is e.g. a canal, river, reservoir, lake etc.

The posters can be displayed in the classroom, youth centre etc. Place them low down so they are at eye level for the target audience. You may wish to get your group to devise and show a Powerpoint presentation aimed at younger children. See also the Water Safety Challenge at [canalriverexplorers.org.uk](http://canalriverexplorers.org.uk).



This roleplay activity shows how Chris didn't obey the SAFE rule - and ended up in the canal. The story (page 11) sets the scene and shows what Chris did wrong.

**Important:** we don't recommend that younger children attempt to pull or remove somebody from the water, as this will put their own lives in danger. They should ask an adult to help or know other ways of helping.

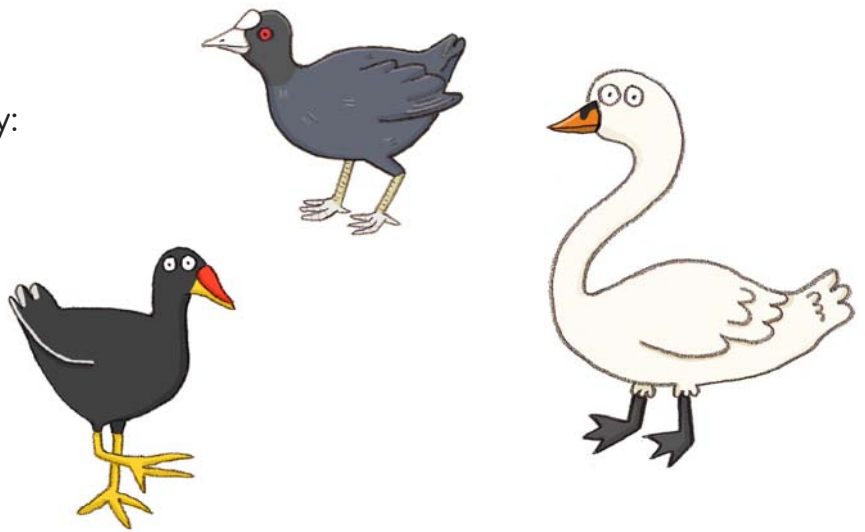
### Aim:

- To make children aware of how to deal with a person in difficulties in the water.
- To demonstrate that the first action should always be to:
  - use a phone to call the emergency services
  - shout for help.

### You will need:

Optional 'props' for use in roleplay:

- 2 ropes (about 4-5m long)
- 2 mobile phones
- strong stick (1-2m long)
- scarf
- small change/plastic coins
- plastic bag
- pair of wellies
- large plastic bottle
- a jumper, coat or shirt
- whistle
- chocolate bar



**Note:** Some Canal & River Trust sites have water safety loan boxes available for loan, if you are able to collect them. Contact the education co-ordinators for more information at [explorers@canalrivertrust.org.uk](mailto:explorers@canalrivertrust.org.uk).

## Activity: Stage 1

Read the story on page 11 to the children to set the scene.

Ask children to tell you all the things that Chris has done wrong i.e:

- She went to the canal alone.
- She didn't tell anyone where she was going.
- She played with a ball on the canal edge.
- She went too close to the canal edge (she didn't **SAFE**).



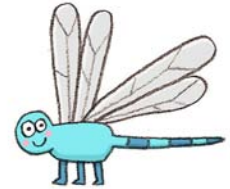
## Stage 2:

Explain to the children that:

- They will be working in groups to show how they would rescue Chris.
- One child in each group should play the part of Chris.
- Each group will have a list of equipment to help save Chris - but not everything on the list may be useful!
- They will have **10 minutes** to prepare their roleplay. Once the groups have prepared theirs, each group performs to the others.

They must work out how to:

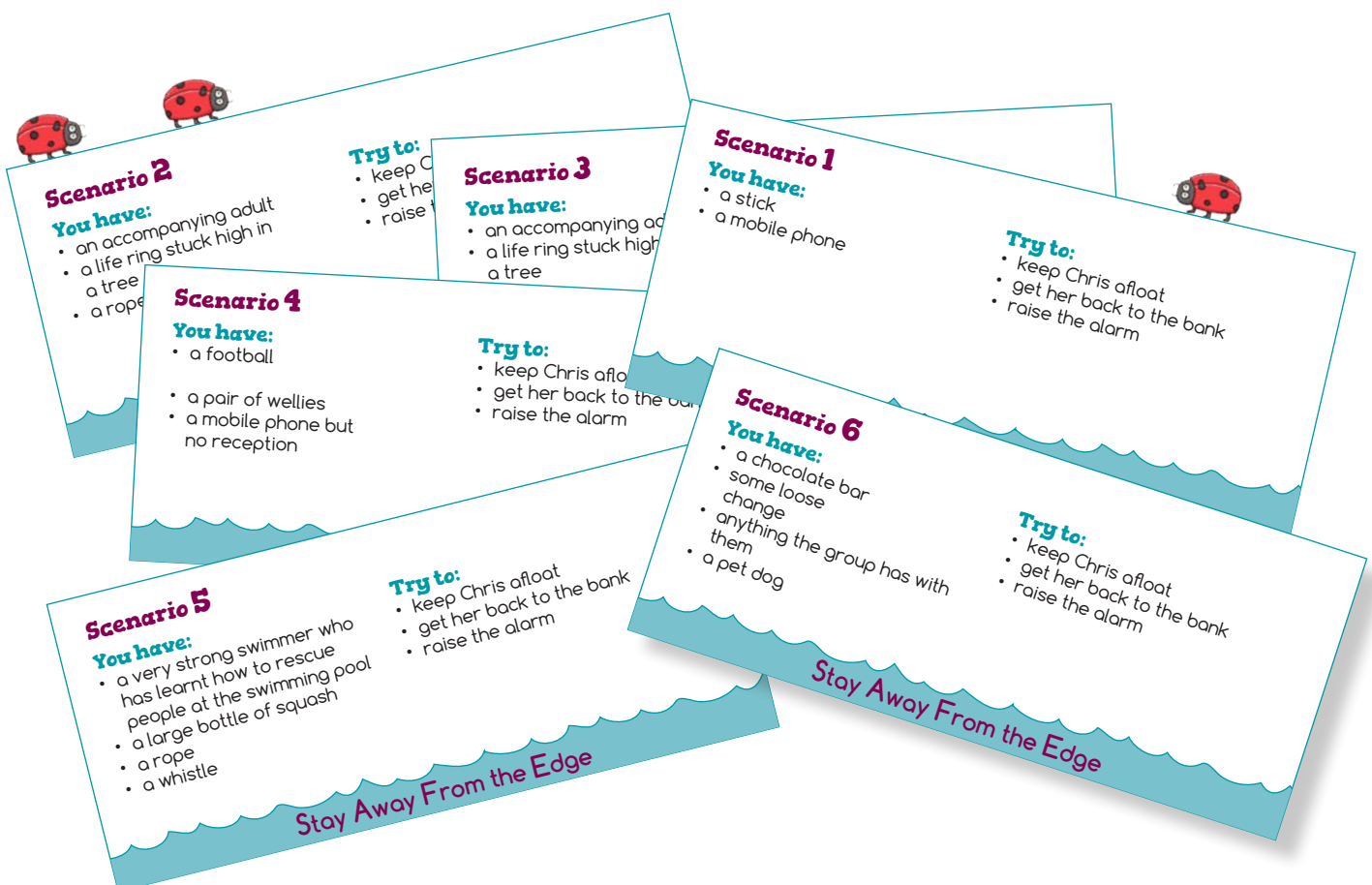
- Raise the alarm.
- Keep Chris afloat.
- Get her to back to the edge.
- Follow the **SAFE** message at all times.



The children work in six groups:

- Each group is given a scenario card (see below) or the actual items, if you are using them.
- Each card offers a possible solution to a problem and the key points to be emphasised.
- They should decide how they would use them to get Chris out of the water and roleplay their solutions.
- There are some 'red herrings' in the item lists - e.g. you couldn't rescue someone with wellies or a chocolate bar!

Photocopy the cards on pages 12 & 13, cut them out and distribute to your six groups.



## Scenario 1: Suggested solutions



- Shout to Chris to see if she can stand up.
- One member of the group phones the emergency services.
- Another tries to reassure Chris and persuade her to swim towards the edge and shout for help.

Explain that the group should follow the advice that the emergency services give them and that while they wait they should remember to **Stay Away From the Edge**.

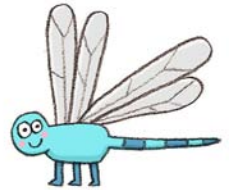
### Key points for discussion:

- How to dial 999 and ask for help. (You can still dial this number even if there is no credit on your phone.)
- How to give clear instructions saying where you are e.g. the nearest road or any landmarks you can see.
- Only older children or an adult should try reaching with a stick. But be careful - you could be pulled in yourself. The best way to help is to lie down on the floor before reaching out.

## Scenario 2: Suggested solutions

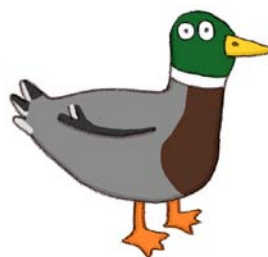


- Shout to Chris to see if she can stand up.
- The adult should take control of the situation. If two children go for help they should stay together, **Stay Away From the Edge** and find a way of contacting the emergency services. They should be told to come straight back.
- When asking for help, try to give a bridge name or number and the nearest road, place name or landmark.
- The adult lies down on the canal edge and using the scarf or the umbrella should try and reach Chris. He/she could then pull her towards the edge.
- The other children should talk to Chris to reassure her and encourage her to swim for the edge and shout for help.



### Key points for discussion:

- Going for help in a pair and staying together to help each other and so that one person doesn't get lost.
- Finding help from a passing boater, people walking or cycling, a nearby shop.
- The adult should lie down so that they don't get pulled into the water.





## Scenario 3: Suggested solutions



- Shout to Chris to see if she can stand up.
- The adult should take control of the situation and send two children together along the towpath to get help. The children should remain together, **Stay Away From the Edge** and come straight back.
- The adult should check that the children know what to say when they are asked where the accident has happened.
- The adult should coil the rope, hold one end without tying it to themselves, and throw it towards Chris. They should then sit down. Chris should catch the end of the rope and hold on to it whilst she is pulled towards the edge.
- The other children can try talking to Chris to reassure her and get her to grab hold of the rope. They could try and attract attention by shouting.

### Key points for discussion:

- Two children should stay together so they can help each other.
- Places to find help – local shops, people walking, boating or cycling, fishermen, a telephone box.
- Life rings are very heavy and can injure the person in danger if not used correctly. Throw the life ring next to the person but not at them. Life rings can be dangerous when used incorrectly, so they are not always provided on canals and rivers.



## Scenario 4: Suggested solutions



- Shout to Chris to see if she can stand up.
- The phone will not work so two of the children should set off to get help. They need to remain together and know what they are looking for i.e. some way of contacting the emergency services. They should return once they have found help. The children need to know what to say when they are asked to give the location of the accident. They should be reminded to **Stay Away From the Edge**.
- The children on the edge can talk to Chris to reassure her. They should throw the ball to her. If she holds on to it, it will act like a float. They should encourage Chris to keep hold of the float and try to swim towards the canal edge. They can also try shouting to attract attention.

### Key points for discussion:

- Places to call emergency services – ask at a shop, pub or nearby house. Find out how to use a phone box.
- Two children should stay together so they can help each other.
- Wellies are not a good idea because the water could be very deep.

## Scenario 5: Suggested solutions



- Shout to Chris to see if she can stand up.
- The two children should set off to get help.
- The children could empty the big plastic bottle of drink, put the top back on it and throw the empty bottle to Chris. The children should then encourage Chris to put it under her chin to help keep her head out of the water. Then they can tell her to kick her legs and try to swim for the edge. They can blow the whistle to attract attention.

### Key points for discussion:

- Even strong swimmers can get into difficulties in cold water.
- Would the bottle work as a float if it didn't have a top on or was made of glass?
- Throwing the rope could put the children in danger because they could be pulled into the water as well. Try tying it to a tree, bollard or something else nearby and then throwing the other end in.

## Scenario 6: Suggested solutions



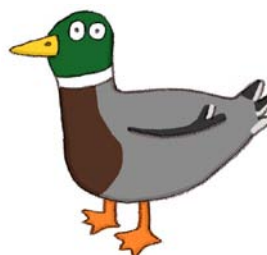
- Shout to Chris to see if she can stand up.
- Two of the children should set off to get help.
- The children on the edge can talk to Chris to reassure her. They should **Stay Away From the Edge**, shout for help and encourage Chris to move towards the edge.



### Key points for discussion:

- All sorts of everyday objects could help Chris to float – a ball, an empty pop bottle with the lid screwed on, a piece of wood.
- Only specially trained dogs can rescue people.
- Reaching Chris with a piece of clothing could be a good idea for an adult, but beware of falling in yourself.

Note: all the children should have a go at coiling and throwing a rope.





## Rescue Stations

(Group leader to read this story)

Chris was fed up. Her mum was at work so she had to go to her grandad's house for the day.

He lived in a small house. There wasn't really room for Chris to play football in the tiny garden. But in any case, he didn't like her playing with balls in the garden because he said the flowerbeds would be ruined. What's more his computer was broken and she had seen all his DVDs. IT WAS DEAD BORING!

The trouble was, Chris' grandad thought she should spend the day reading. But Chris wasn't that type of girl. She wanted to be outside, playing football or exploring. Looking out of the window, she could see her grandad hard at work, weeding the front garden. Quietly, she slipped out of the back door. At the bottom of the garden, Chris opened the gate and on to the path.

Nearby was the canal. Chris knew it was an excellent place to explore, but her grandad would never let her go there unless he went too. She remembered the wide and straight towpath was perfect for dribbling a football. Chris ran along it, kicking the ball from foot to foot.

After a while Chris stopped to watch a family of ducklings swimming by the edge. One of the ducklings had something on its beak but Chris couldn't quite see what it was. She crouched on the edge and leant forward to get a better look.

As she reached forward, she knocked the ball into the water. Desperately, she grabbed a stick and reached out towards the football with it. Suddenly, she overbalanced and Chris found herself in the freezing water. "Help!" she shouted. "Help! Help!" But the edge was deserted and the football floated away.



## Scenario 1

### You have:

- a stick
- a mobile phone

### Try to:

- keep Chris afloat
- get her to move near to the edge
- raise the alarm

Stay Away From the Edge

## Scenario 2

### You have:

- an accompanying adult
- a scarf
- a coat or jumper
- a plastic bag

### Try to:

- keep Chris afloat
- get her to move near to the edge
- raise the alarm

Stay Away From the Edge

## Scenario 3

### You have:

- an accompanying adult
- a life ring stuck high in a tree
- a rope

### Try to:

- keep Chris afloat
- get her to move near to the edge
- raise the alarm

Stay Away From the Edge

## Scenario 4

### You have:

- a football
- a pair of wellies
- a mobile phone but no reception

### Try to:

- keep Chris afloat
- get her to move near to the edge
- raise the alarm

Stay Away From the Edge

## Scenario 5

### You have:

- a very strong swimmer who has learnt how to rescue people at the swimming pool
- a large bottle of squash
- a rope
- a whistle

### Try to:

- keep Chris afloat
- get her to move near to the edge
- raise the alarm

Stay Away From the Edge

## Scenario 6

### You have:

- a chocolate bar
- some loose change
- anything the group has with them
- a pet dog

### Try to:

- keep Chris afloat
- get her to move near to the edge
- raise the alarm

Stay Away From the Edge

8. Swap places with the player behind you.

9. Pick up 2 cards and follow both instructions.

10. Throw again and go back to the space with that number.

7. Throw again and go back that number of spaces.

6. You Stay Away From the Edge. Go ahead 1 space.



5. Pick up a card and give it to another player.

START

1. Pick up a card.

2. You take an adult. Go ahead 1 space.

This activity is designed to reinforce sensible behaviour when near water. It can be printed off and used in small groups as an extension activity.

### Aim:

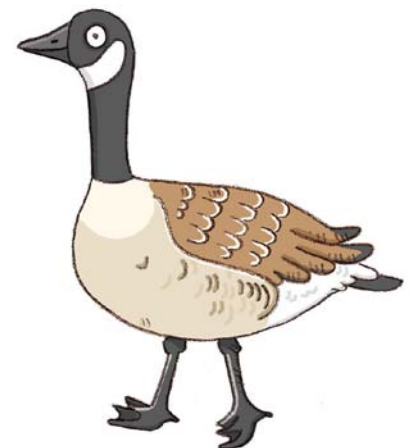
- To raise children's awareness of the appropriate behaviour near canals and rivers (canals, rivers, lakes, reservoirs etc.)
- To alert children to the fact that their behaviour has consequences.

### You will need:

- For each group the board game sheet, cards, scissors, pencil, dice.
- For each child: a counter.
- Photocopied cards for filling in (see pages 12 & 13).

## Activities

- Explain to children that the board game rewards sensible actions and dangerous ones will be penalised. Divide the children into groups of four.
- Before playing, the cards will need to be completed. Get the children to read the cards and to decide whether the action is a sensible one (forwards) or a dangerous one (backwards) and fill in the cards to say how many moves backwards or forwards you go if you pick that card.
- Once the children have filled in the cards they cut them out and place them in the space on the board game sheet. Roll the dice. Even numbers go ahead 2 spaces. Odd numbers go ahead 1 space. Follow the instruction in the spaces. As the game progresses, used cards are returned to the bottom of the pile.
- At the end of the game, get children to recap some of the actions which would have negative consequences, and on those which would have positive consequences. Remind the children of the SAFE message. Can they see why it's a good message to follow?







Ask the children to decide whether the action on the card is positive or not and then write in the instruction.

1. You remember to always Stay Away From the Edge. **Forwards 1**
2. You don't walk on a frozen river – you use a bridge instead. **Forwards 1**
3. You try to go across a lock gate because of a dare. **Backwards 1**
4. You refuse to swim in the river because you know it can be dangerous. **Forwards 1**
5. You wade into the water to get a ball back. **Backwards 1**
6. You go to the reservoir by yourself, without telling anyone. **Backwards 1**
7. Someone needs help in the water. You still Stay Away From the Edge. **Forwards 1**
8. You jump off a bridge because your friend did. **Backwards 1**
9. A friend tells you it's OK to swim in the river. You don't because you know it's not safe. **Forward 2**
10. You push a friend in the water 'for a laugh'. **Backwards 1**
11. You slip on some wet grass by the edge of the canal. **Backwards 1**
12. You play with lock gears and trap your fingers. **Backwards 1**
13. You visit a canal with an adult and have a great time. **Forwards 1**
14. You keep your eyes open and avoid tripping over a rope. **Forwards 1**
15. You're thirsty and the water looks clean, so you drink some. **Backwards 1**
16. You tell your friends to Stay Away From the Edge. **Forwards 1**




**1.** You remember to always **Stay Away From the Edge.**  
 forwards 1 

**5.** You wade into the water to get a ball back.   
 .....

**2.** You don't walk on a frozen river – you use a bridge instead.   
 forwards 1 .....


**3.** You try to go across a lock gate because of a dare.  
 backwards 1 .....

**4.** You refuse to swim in the river because you know it can be dangerous.

**10.** You push a friend in the water 'for a laugh'.   
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**1.** You remember to always **Stay Away From the Edge.** 


.....

**2.** You don't walk on a frozen river – you use a bridge instead. 


.....

**3.** You try to go across a lock gate because of a dare. 

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**7.** Someone needs help in the water. You still **Stay Away From the Edge.** 

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**15.** You're thirsty and the water looks clean, so you drink some. 

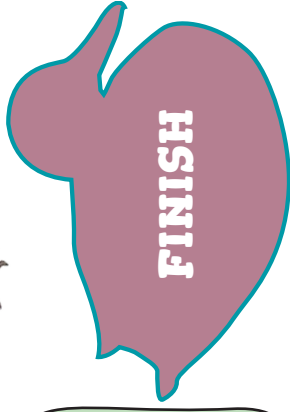
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**16.** You tell your friends to **Stay Away From the Edge.** 

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# Water Safety Game



## How to play the game

1. Each player rolls the dice in turn. For even numbers go forwards 2 spaces, for odd numbers go backwards 1 space.
2. Follow the instructions on the space or card.
3. The winner is whoever makes it to the school / house (whatever the end point is) safely.

**Place cards here**

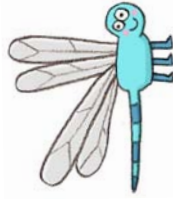
**9.** Pick up 2 cards and follow both instructions.

**10.** Throw again and go back to the space with that number.

**8.** Swap places with the player behind you.

**7.** Throw again and go back that number of spaces.

**6.** You **Stay Away From the Edge.**  
Go ahead 1 space.



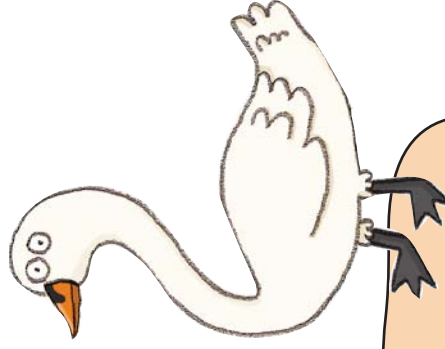
**1.** Pick up a card.

**START**



**5.** Pick up a card and give it to another player.

**4.** Pick up a card.



**3.** You drop some litter. Miss a turn.

**2.** You take an adult. Go ahead 1 space.



The aim of this activity is to alert children there are all sorts of hazards near waterways – even adults may not be aware of them.

**Aim:** To alert children to the possible dangers to be found near canals and rivers.

**You will need:** 'Spot the hazards' picture and pencils.

### Activity:

- Remind children that visiting canals and rivers with an adult can be a great day out provided they follow the **SAFE** message and **Stay Away From the Edge**.
- There are some possible dangers found near canals and rivers – can children suggest any e.g. dangers in water and on the edge?
- Give out a 'Spot the Hazards' picture and ask children to identify danger spots. Note: not everything in the picture is a hazard!
- Check everyone has identified the hazards correctly and they are clear why they are potentially dangerous (see page 19).
- Discuss what needs to make the potential hazards safe. Ask children to make a list of the changes e.g. moving cyclist away from the edge of the edge.

### Answers to potential hazards:

- Child running off because the parents have become distracted.
- Children playing too near the water's edge.
- Child swimming in canal.
- Children sitting on the edge of a bridge.
- Children swinging from tree over the canal.
- Child about to dive into a lock with strong currents and very deep water.
- A weir with fast running water.
- Fisherman with long pole which can trip people up.
- Objects in the water which may be sharp or trap your feet.
- Cyclist very close to the edge.

At the end of the session remind children of the importance of following the **SAFE** message.





Stay Away From the Edge

[canalriverexplorers.org.uk](http://canalriverexplorers.org.uk)