

Be River Safe

Supervision at Rivers

Fact Sheet

SUPERVISION AT RIVERS AND SWIMMING HOLES

River swimming spots are great places to be in the summer, but sadly they can be places where children, young people and adults drown.

Nature of rivers

Swimming in a river is different to swimming in a pool or in the sea. The water is cold and you don't float as easily as in sea water. If you go beyond the safe swimming hole you can be swept down stream by the river current.

The force of the water running downstream often takes people by surprise and they are swept off their feet into fast flowing water.

Supervising children, young people and adults in the water

When lots of people gather at the swimming hole it is important to be clear who has the responsibility for supervising those in the water.

It is easy for everyone to think someone else is supervising. Sadly drownings often happen when there are lots of adults about but no-one has taken the responsibility to actively supervise those children, young people or adults in the water.

If you are at the river with a group set up some times when adult individuals take responsibility for supervision. Share the task around so no-one misses out on the fun, but those in the water are always actively supervised.

Supervision should be by someone in the water. The person who is supervising needs to concentrate on watching those in the water and not be distracted.

When a larger group is in the water supervision can be by someone in the water and someone on the bank, but close enough to act if required.



Be River Safe ... *supervise children and learners*

Be River Safe

Supervision at Rivers

Fact Sheet

Active supervision

The person supervising needs to focus only on one task, watching those in the water. They must not be distracted by things like:

- Playing games.
- Teaching one child or person to swim.
- Talking to others.
- Dealing with small children's needs.
- Preparing food.
- Eating or drinking.

Supervision by non-swimmers or poor swimmers

The person supervising in the water needs to be a strong swimmer. A non-swimmer or poor swimmer could supervise from the bank but they must have support and be able to alert someone with the skills to help if they see someone in trouble.



Supervising children under five

When children are under five, supervision means being within sight and within reach of the children.

If there are a number of under fives then there needs to be plenty of adults watching them. It's too easy for one person to be distracted by one child and not see another one in difficulty.

It takes less than a minute for someone to drown and it is very quiet.

Supervising learners and anyone who cannot swim

Any one who cannot swim or is learning to swim needs to be actively supervised. The supervisor needs to be within sight and within touch of any one who cannot swim or is learning to swim.

The supervisor needs to make sure the learners and non-swimmers remain in shallower water well away from the river current.

Supervising when children, non-swimmers and the elderly are by the river

Every year people drown when they end up in the river unexpectedly. They may fall in and be swept away by the river current.

Take care on river banks and supervise children, non-swimmers and the elderly when they are by the river.

Don't let older children supervise younger children

Rivers are our most dangerous aquatic environment. It is just too dangerous to have older children supervise younger children.

An older child may be distracted for a moment by their own play. If a child was swept into the current, an older child who attempts a rescue may be swept away and drown as well.

Be River Safe ... *look after your buddy*

Using a buddy system

Everyone in the water should be encouraged to act responsibly and watch out for themselves and their buddies. Many families and groups use a pair buddy system with two people or children watching out for each other.

Acting responsibly – encourage a Be River Safe attitude

Everyone in the water needs to take responsibility for their safety.

- Discuss the need for everyone to look out for themselves and others and use a buddy system.
- Set clear limits about where individuals can swim or play and what activities are acceptable e.g. no splashing, no fighting or pulling anyone under.
- Praise children and young people when they act responsibly.
- If necessary enforce the rules and explain why you have the rules.

What to do if someone is being swept down the river

If someone moves out of the swimming hole and is in the river current being swept downstream the only safe rescue is a land based rescue.

Do not enter the river after them. It is unlikely you will be able to reach them to help them and you may need to be rescued yourself.

A safe rescue is a land based rescue.

- Follow the person in trouble down the river bank.
- Find a safe place where the person may be able to swim towards the bank and you can reach out over the river.
- Use an object like a kayak paddle or a tree branch to reach out over the river.
- Encourage the person in trouble to grab the branch or paddle and hang on.
- Pull them to the river bank and help them out.

If you cannot rescue the person safely from the bank:

- Alert rescue services immediately.
- Encourage the person to turn on their back and float feet first down the river (*See website Survival swimming and the factsheet: SURVIVAL SWIMMING*).
- If practical, throw the person a buoyant object like a bucket, chilly bin or ball that they can hang onto and use to keep themselves afloat.