

Swim teachers, coaches and life savers should consider integrating these practices as standard procedure.

ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION IN WATER SPORTS



**HIDDEN  
DANGERS**

Young children face significant dangers around open water environments like lakes, rivers, oceans, ponds, and even seemingly innocuous sources like buckets or shallow water features. Drowning is the leading cause of death for children aged 1-4 years. The primary dangers stem from a combination of the child's developmental stage and the inherent complexities of natural water bodies.

Open water locations like beaches and rivers can be quite noisy. The sound of waves, seagulls, rushing water, and other children playing can be confusing and disorienting for Deaf or hard-of-hearing children, making verbal communication incredibly difficult, if not impossible. Many DHH children also rely on hearing aids or cochlear implants, which are typically not waterproof, adding another layer of communication challenge during swimming.

## Rapid and Silent Drowning:

**1. QUICK AND QUIET:** Drowning can happen in seconds and often without any splashing or cries for help. Young children, especially infants, may not have the awareness or ability to call out.

**SHALLOW WATER RISK:** A child can drown in as little as a few centimetres of water, making even small puddles, buckets, or unemptied paddling pools hazardous.

**TOP-HEAVY PHYSIOLOGY:** Toddlers are typically top-heavy, making them prone to falling headfirst into water and unable to right themselves.

## 2. Hidden Hazards of Open Water:

**CURRENTS AND TIDES:** Rivers, creeks, and oceans can have strong, unpredictable currents or rip tides that are often not visible from the surface. These can quickly sweep a child away.

**LIMITED VISIBILITY:** Murky water in lakes, ponds, and rivers can hide submerged objects like rocks, logs, or uneven surfaces, which can cause trips, falls, or entrapment. It also makes it difficult to see a child who has fallen in.

**UNKNOWN DEPTHS AND DROP-OFFS:** Unlike pools with marked depths, open water areas often lack depth indicators and can have sudden, unexpected drop-offs, leading a child into water over their head.

**COLD TEMPERATURES:** Open water is typically colder than pool water, which can lead to hypothermia, shock, and impair a child's swimming ability and confidence.

**UNEVEN SURFACES:** The bottom of natural water bodies can be slippery, rocky, or muddy, making it difficult for children to stand or maintain balance.

**MARINE LIFE/OTHER HAZARDS:** Depending on the location (e.g., coastal areas in Australia), there could be dangerous marine life, or other hazards like debris, broken glass, or entanglement risks from vegetation.

## 3. Developmental Factors in Children:

### CURIOSITY AND LACK OF DANGER AWARENESS:

Young children are naturally curious and attracted to water but lack the understanding of its inherent dangers.

**OVERESTIMATION OF ABILITIES:** Children, even those who have had swimming lessons, may overestimate their abilities, especially in unfamiliar open water conditions.

**RELIANCE ON FLOTATION DEVICES:** While helpful, inflatable toys or non-approved flotation devices can give a false sense of security and are not substitutes for adult supervision. They can also deflate, slip off, or tip a child face down.

## 4. Supervision Challenges:

**DISTRACTION:** The majority of child drownings occur due to a lack of constant, active adult supervision. Distractions like mobile phones, conversations, or household chores can allow a child to wander off unnoticed and fall into water.

**COMPLACENCY:** Parents can become complacent about safety, especially in familiar home environments with pools or other water features.

**OVER-RELIANCE ON OLDER CHILDREN:** Older siblings are not equipped to supervise younger children effectively around water.

In summary, the unpredictable nature of open water combined with the inherent vulnerabilities of young children makes these environments extremely dangerous without rigorous and constant supervision.

## HIDDEN DANGERS: a summary

When you go to the beach to play or to swim, look out for things that can be dangerous.

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Remember to check the beach for Sea creatures that may wash up on the beach like bluebottles.

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If you poke around in rock pools don't touch the blue ring octopus.

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If you are playing in the sand dunes keep an eye out for snakes.

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Avoid going into the water on rocks - they may be slippery.

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Don't climb down cliffs - they may collapse.

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If the water looks really dark OR murky its probably really deep - don't go in dark water.

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Don't swim at dawn or dusk - its hard to see what is in the water

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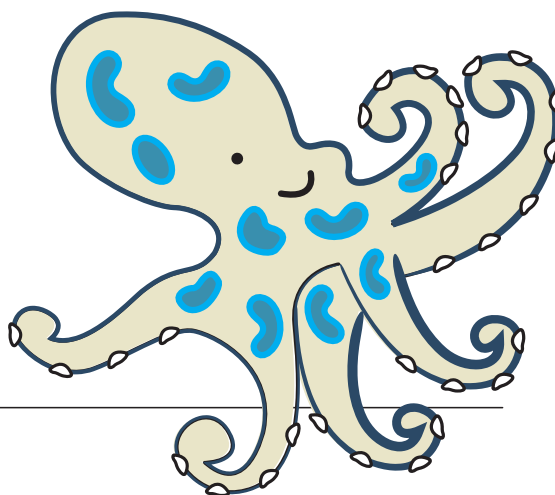
IF there are debris, sticks, rubbish, mud or sand suspended in the water - don't swim as you may infect your ears

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Don't wade into the water If its muddy and squishy as you may lose your balance or become stuck in the mud.

## DID YOU KNOW?

**Open Water isn't just for swim schools. If you offer activities or programs on the beach for children or young people, we'd love to have you on our side!**



For further information about Deaf Children Australia.

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Deaf Children Australia uses the term 'deaf' to refer to all degrees and types of hearing loss.  
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**puggles**

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