

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

ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION IN
WATER SPORTS



**MAKING EVERY
SPLASH SAFE:
WATER SAFETY &
DEAF-FRIENDLY
ENVIRONMENTS**

Water activities are fantastic fun for children, and ensuring everyone can enjoy them safely is our top priority. For children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH), open water environments can present unique challenges, but with a little awareness, we can make every experience inclusive and wonderful.

Creating a Deaf-Friendly Water Environment

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 DHH 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.

But don't worry, there are many simple yet impactful ways to make communication easier for everyone:

VISUAL COMMUNICATION HUB: Have a clear board displaying teachers' names, faces, and club rules. This provides consistent visual information.

DEAF-AWARENESS POSTERS: Download and display a poster with key deaf-awareness tips for all staff and participants.

CLEAR VISUAL SIGNAGE: Create easy-to-understand visual signs for essential areas like toilets, showers, and changing rooms.

INFORM STAFF: Ensure teachers, assistants, lifeguards, and receptionists are aware that a DHH child is attending. A quick heads-up can make a huge difference.

CHOOSE QUIETER SPOTS: When giving instructions, try to find less noisy areas around the beach or river to minimise distractions.

BRIEFINGS IN DRY AREAS: Explain important information close to changing rooms, where children can comfortably wear their hearing technology for better understanding.

FACE THE LIGHT: Always ensure light shines on your face, not from behind you. This is crucial for clear lip-reading and visual cues.

Empower with AUSLAN: Learning just a few basic AUSLAN signs can have a profound impact on DHH children and their families, fostering a sense of belonging and safety.

Display QR codes for essential safety signs: Stay on the path, No running, Danger, Stop.

The Golden Rule: Active Supervision for All

While inclusive communication is vital, it's just one piece of the water safety puzzle. No matter a child's hearing ability, constant, active supervision is the absolute golden rule when around water. Drowning can happen quickly and silently, and the impact on families is devastating.

Young children, especially those aged 0 to 4 years, are at the highest risk of drowning. Their natural curiosity draws them to water, but they don't yet grasp the concept of danger. Parents and carers must provide 'eyes on' and 'hands on' supervision at all times. Remember, inland waterways in Australia are often not patrolled by lifeguards, meaning help may not be immediately available if a child gets into trouble.

Understanding the Risks: Vital Facts on Drowning in Australia

Here are some key statistics highlighting why constant vigilance is so crucial, especially around inland waterways:

In Australia, more fatal drownings occur when swimming at inland waterways (rivers, lakes, dams) than at the beach. In fact, inland waterways are the most prominent location for unintentional fatal drownings.

42%

Alarminglly, 42% of all non-fatal drowning incidents occur in children aged 0-4 years.

Limited swimming skills and a lack of water safety knowledge are major risk factors for drowning. This includes insufficient understanding of hazards and risks in different aquatic locations.

40% A concerning 40% of children leaving primary school are unable to achieve the minimum National Benchmark for swimming and water safety skills.

Toddlers, specifically one-year-olds, record the highest drowning rate of any age group [3.47/100,000 population].

For every fatal drowning, there are three non-fatal drowning incidents, which can lead to long-term health consequences.

61% A significant 61% of drowning deaths occur outside of major cities, often in regional or remote areas.

47% Rivers and creeks alone account for 47% of all drownings in Australia.

For children aged 5-14 years, open water environments, including rivers and lakes (where 70% of drownings occur in remote or regional areas), pose the greatest drowning risk.

By understanding these risks and implementing strong supervision and inclusive practices, we can help ensure that every child's experience around water is safe and joyful.

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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