Stay on Top of the Water

A water safety decision-making guide for young people

Children's Hospital & Regional Medical Center

Washington State Department of Health

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
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Health Resources and Services Administration
Maternal and Child Health Bureau

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For more information contact:
Washington State Drowning Prevention Project:
Elizabeth Bennett or Megan Murphy
Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center
4800 Sand Point Way NE CM-09
Seattle, Washington 98105
www.seattlechildrens.org/dp/
206/527-5797
Email: ebenne@chmc.org or mmurp2@chmc.org
or
Kathy Williams
Washington State Department of Health
Office of Emergency Medical and Trauma Prevention
PO Box 47853
Olympia, WA 98504
360/705-6738
Email: Kathy.Williams@doh.wa.gov

Dear Parents, Guardians, and Educators,

Today we are all concerned about the safety of young people. We think about violence and the use of guns. We worry about substance abuse and how to help young people make good decisions. We think about cars, speeding and driving under the influence of alcohol. But we often don't think about the safety of our young people when they are on the water, either swimming or boating. If we do, we think it's a summer time issue— fun in the sun. Water safety is a concern for our young people, and it is a year round concern.

Look at the facts:

- ☑ Drowning is second only to car crashes as the most frequent cause of unintentional injury death for 15 to19 year-olds.
- ☑ More males drown than females, and in many states more teenagers and young adults drown than young children.
- ☑ Most of the drownings of teenagers and young adults occur in small boats or while swimming in lakes, rivers, and streams.
- ☑ Most of the drownings of teenagers and young adults occur in situations where several friends are present.
- ☑ Most of the drownings of teenagers and young adults occur in situations where people aren't wearing life jackets.
- ☑ Most of the drownings of teenagers and young adults occur in situations where a swimmer's strength is overpowered by the conditions of the water. It happens quickly and usually quietly. All at once, a swimmer gets tired and can't get back to shore.

The good news is there is something you can do about it. Drownings are preventable. *Stay On Top Of The Water* is an important decision-making guide for young people. There are three important messages included in the five-activity program:

- ☑ Know the Water
- ☑ Know Your Limits
- ☑ Wear a Life Jacket

Share *Stay On Top Of The Water* with other schools and youth groups in your community. Involve young people in all the activities. Be involved and be aware of the risks. We know that drownings are preventable. We need your help to make your family and community water safe. Call the project office for more information or with any questions. Thank you!

Sincerely,

The Washington State Drowning Prevention Project

Project Office: Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center • PO Box 5371, CM-09 Seattle, WA 98105-0371 • 206/527/5797 • www.seattlechildrens.org/dp/

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Kathy Whitman	Seattle Parks and Recreation

Project Team: Elizabeth Bennett, MPH, CHES - Project Coordinator, Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center
Linda Quan, MD - Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center
Kathy Williams, MS - WA State Department of Health, Office of Emergency Medical and Trauma Prevention

Writer: Neal Starkman, PhD, Flashpoint Development

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About the Activities in this Guide

Stay on Top of the Water addresses a significant concern in the United States: drowning among young people. Consider the following myths and facts that put young people at risk around water.

#1 MYTH: Nothing bad is going to happen when you're swimming or boating.

FACT: Drowning is second only to car crashes as the most frequent cause of unintentional death from injuries among teenagers and young adults. Over 600 youth age 15 to19 years in the U.S. die each year from drowning.

#2 MYTH: Young children are the ones who are really at risk for drowning.

FACT: In many states, more teenagers and young adults drown than young children.

#3 MYTH: Most drownings happen in swimming pools and bathtubs.

FACT: Most drownings among teenagers and adults occur while they're using small boats or while they're swimming in lakes or rivers.

#4 MYTH: Swimming across a body of water is okay if you're with a bunch of friends who can look out for each other.

FACT: Most of the teenagers and young adults who drown are in situations where several people are present.

#5 MYTH: Once you learn to swim, you don't need to wear a life jacket anymore.

FACT: Most of the teenagers and young adults who drown are in situations where people aren't wearing life jackets, among people who know how to swim.

#6 MYTH: If you're a good swimmer, you don't need to worry. Drowning happens to people who can't swim.

FACT: Most of the drownings among teenagers and young adults occur when a swimmer's strength is overpowered by the conditions of the water. It happens quickly – all at once; a swimmer gets tired and can't get back to shore.

The *Stay On Top of the Water* Guide helps people make safe and smart decisions around the water by using essential elements of effective prevention programs as supported by the National Health Education Standards.

The Guide includes important learning activities that:

- show young people when they're at risk of getting into serious trouble
- help young people develop decision-making skills needed before they go swimming or out in a small boat
- teach a specific skill, *The Refusal Skill*™, to help young people resist pressure from their friends to do dangerous things
- encourage young people to create a behavior norm of life-jacket use

This approach links closely to the National Health Education Standards, which specifically include content and skills related to water safety. Decision-making skills are an integral part of the physical activity content area and the injury prevention content area in the Standards.

Stay on Top of the Water also incorporates elements of the developmental assets framework developed by the Search Institute in Minneapolis. This framework acknowledges the research-based associations of 40 qualities, attitudes, and behaviors—called "developmental assets"—with success and safety among young people. Several of the assets are directly applicable to reducing the risk of drowning.

- Adult Role Models—Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.
- Positive Peer Influence—Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.
- Caring—Young person places high value on helping other people.
- Responsibility—Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.
- Planning and Decision Making—Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.
- Resistance Skills—Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.
- Personal Power—Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me."

Encouraging young people to achieve these assets not only helps protect them against drowning but also establishes a foundation for all kinds of success.

Finally, a few words about implementation. We designed the *Stay on Top of the Water* Guide to be used in classrooms or by camp and youth programs. Teachers, counselors, youth leaders, and safety advocates can use the Guide, which includes five activities that each take 30 to 60 minutes to implement. You'll need a large, open room or space for each session, as well as a big sheet of paper or flip chart and markers. We've included handouts in the activities, which you can read out loud or distribute to participants. You can find handout masters in the guide's Appendix. We designed the activities in the Guide to be easy to teach and interesting to learn. You can teach them without extensive equipment or materials to a group of 10-30 young people. *Try everything*, but use what works best for you. Reinforce and expand these activities with the suggested Additional Learning Activities at the end of each activity.

We welcome feedback, including the results from your "Agree or Disagree" handouts, which we've included in the first and last activities. Please contact us:
Washington State Drowning Prevention Project
Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center
PO Box 5731/CM-09
4800 Sand Point Way NE
Seattle, Washington 98105
206/527-5797
www.seattlechildrens.org/dp/

Thank you for using *Stay on Top of the Water.* **Drowning is preventable**. We appreciate your participation in these important prevention activities.

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Activity 1: Decisions and Consequences

In this activity, young people express their opinions about water safety and discuss the consequences of their decisions.

What You Want to Happen

Young people demonstrate the ability to:

- discuss potentially difficult decisions relating to water safety
- state possible positive and negative consequences of decisions made when going swimming or out in a boat

What You'll Need

- note pad and markers
- handouts, "Agree or Disagree?" and "Facts about Drowning"
- newspaper article, "Oak Harbor teen drowns in North Whidbey lake" (or a similar article from an area newspaper)
- name tags (optional)

How You'll Prepare

Make copies of:

- **Agree or Disagree? (optional)**
- **Facts about Drowning**
- **newspaper article, "Oak Harbor teen drowns in North Whidbey lake"** (or a similar article from a local newspaper).

Introduction

1. Introduce yourself to the group, and say that you'll be spending some time with them helping them to have fun in and near the water while still being safe. Let them know that they'll be learning lots of things that they'll probably find useful in other parts of their lives, too.

Objective

2. Tell your group that today they're going to talk about what young people do around the water, particularly in the case of a drowning. Check if any in the group feel this will be too difficult because they've experienced a drowning or near-drowning. If someone has, invite that person to share the story (if that's comfortable), and check if it's okay to continue**.** Otherwise, elicit the group's ideas about water safety by asking the question, "When you think about someone drowning, what do you think about?" Record the answers on a **flip chart** or piece of paper.

Now ask the group members about drowning and ask them to tell you how they think drownings occur. Depending on the group, you may wish to skip the exercise *A Real-Life Drowning.*

Agree or Disagree?

3. Distribute the **handout, Agree or Disagree?** (You can also do this out loud, without the handout). Ask young people to answer the questions honestly, because this isn't an exercise about being right or wrong. Gather the handouts if you're using it as a pretest.

4. After everyone is finished, gather near the center of the room, so that they can all move to one side of the room or the other. Give them the following instructions:

    - "This is an activity that lets you *show* people what you think.
    - "I'm going to read you the questions you just answered on your handout. I'd like those of you who agree to walk to this side of the room. *(Point in the direction you intend.)* I'd like those of you who disagree to walk to this side of the room. *(Again, point in the direction you intend.)*
    - "Stay in the center of the room if you're not sure.
    - "I'm going to have everyone move at once, so don't move until I say 'Go,' and then move based on how you answered the question on the handout. Any questions?"

5. Wait a few seconds after you read the statements before you say 'Go!' so that each person has time to think of how to respond (read the statements in the order they appear).

6. After the participants have moved to one side of the room or the other, ask for volunteers to explain why they answered the way they did or use the follow-up questions. Then give everyone an opportunity to move again.

Agree or Disagree?

1. **"Once you can swim, it's okay to stop wearing a life jacket in a boat unless the situation looks dangerous. Move to the left if you agree. Move to the right if you disagree. Go!"**

   Follow-up question: "Why wear a life jacket if you know how to swim and the water is calm?"
   Points to bring out: Weather and water conditions can change quickly. Most teens that drown while boating either fell out of the boat or the boat capsized. It's extremely difficult to find and put a life jacket on once you've fallen into the water.

2. **"Wearing a life jacket is a good idea if you're swimming in a lake or river. Move to the left if you agree. Move to the right if you disagree. Go!"**

   Follow-up question: "Why might life jackets be useful when swimming?"
   Points to bring out: Teens who drown while swimming don't realize how tired they are or how cold they are until it's too late to get back to shore.

3. **"Daring someone to swim across a small lake is okay as long as you swim with friends. Move to the left if you agree. Move to the right if you disagree. Go!"**

   Follow-up question: "What might make it hard to help a friend in trouble in the water?"
   Points to bring out: Most of the drownings that happen to teens occur while they're swimming with friends in a lake or river. One minute, they're fine. The next minute, they say they're tired. The next minute, they're gone. It's important to have a life jacket and something you can use to throw out to someone who needs help.

4. **"It's pretty easy to say no to your friends if you don't want to do something. Move to the left if you agree. Move to the right if you disagree. Go!"**

   Follow-up question: "What makes it hard to say no to your friends?"
   Points to bring out: It's easier to go along with the group than to disagree. Sometimes people feel embarrassed or even humiliated if they don't go along with the group.

5. **"It's a good idea to try to swim in areas that have a lifeguard or are marked for swimming. Move to the left if you agree. Move to the right if you disagree. Go!"**

   Follow-up question: "What's the problem with swimming in places that aren't designated as swim areas?"

Points to bring out: The water may be unfamiliar and dangerous. If you get in trouble and your friends can't help you, there's no one else nearby to provide help.

6. **You can judge how far you can swim in a lake or river by how far you can swim in a pool. Move to the left if you agree. Move to the right if you disagree. Go!"**

   Follow-up question: "What are some of the differences between swimming in a pool and swimming in an open lake or river?"
   Points to bring out: Visibility in the water is a big difference. Water currents, water depth, and water temperature need to be considered. There's no 'edge' to grab on to. You can't see rocks and tree branches or stumps that are under the water.

7. **"It's usually okay to drink a few beers when you're out in a boat. Move to the left if you agree. Move to the right if you disagree. Go!"**

   Follow-up question: "Why isn't it a good idea to drink in a boat?"
   Points to bring out: Alcohol impairs thinking and functioning in any situation. Your ability to make decisions is affected, and your ability to react to an emergency is affected. The boat's movement, wind, or sun increases the effects of alcohol. Alcohol and water don't mix well.

8. **"If your friends want to take risks, then that's their problem. Move to the left if you agree. Move to the right if you disagree. Go!"**

   Follow-up question: "Why should I care if my friends want to take risks?"
   Points to bring out: Having friends is a privilege, but it also brings responsibilities. Part of friendship is caring about the safety and well-being of your friends.

9. **"People in life jackets look stupid. Move to the left if you agree. Move to the right if you disagree. Go!"**

   Follow-up question: "How could you make wearing a life jacket look less stupid?"
   Points to bring out: Traditional life jackets are the ugly, bulky, orange ones you may be thinking of right now. Pick more stylish, well-fitted life jackets, and remember, no matter which type, a life jacket can save your life.

10. **"The rules of water safety are mostly common sense. Move to the left if you agree. Move to the right if you disagree. Go!"**

    Follow-up question: "If the rules of water safety are mostly common sense, why do you think so many people get into dangerous situations around water?"
    Points to bring out: Most of us learn to swim in a pool. The rules for lakes and rivers are a lot different. You have to consider weather, current, water

temperature, depth, and distance from shore. You also have to think about how tired you are, your own swimming ability, and the ability of the friends who are with you. Finally, you have to think about whether everyone has and wears a life jacket. It's hard to know all those conditions.

A Real-Life Drowning

7. Tell the group members that you'd like them to read an account of a real-life drowning and then discuss what they think caused the drowning. Distribute the newspaper article (optional), **"Oak Harbor teen drowns in North Whidbey lake "** (or a similar article from a local newspaper)**,** and read it aloud or have a student read it aloud while everyone else reads along.

8. Focus discussion on the following questions:

   - " What do you think caused the drowning?"
   - " Why do you think the boys decided to swim to the raft?"
   - " What are some ways it could have been prevented?"
   - " Why do you think it would have been difficult for James Holcomb to say no when his friends suggested swimming to the raft?"
   - " Why do you think it would have been difficult for James Holcomb to say no and turn back *after* they all began swimming to the raft?"
   - "How important is it not to lose face in front of your friends?"
   - " Why didn't James call for help?"

   Reach the consensus that:
   - There are a lot of factors that can increase someone's risk of drowning.
   - There are ways to prevent drowning.
   - Friends may not be able to help.
   - It's okay not to go along with everyone else, especially when they're doing something that may be dangerous, if you think you may not be able to do it or you feel uncomfortable about it.

Closure

9. Ask the participants:
   - " What are some of the situations that can increase your risk of getting into trouble around the water?"
   - " What are the some of the negative things that might happen if you're in a situation like James Holcomb and you don't want to go along with everyone else?"

   Conclude that there are tradeoffs for staying safe, and one of those tradeoffs might be that their friends make fun of them. Point out that real friends will still be friends even if they can't get others to do something they're not comfortable with.

Then ask, "What are some of the positive things that might happen if you're in a situation like James Holcomb and you don't want to go along with everyone else?" Conclude that some positive things are staying safe and alive, continuing to enjoy water recreation, helping friends stay safe, and maintaining one's individuality.

10. Collect the **newspaper article** (if handed out); you'll need it in the next lesson.

11. Distribute the **handout, Facts about Drowning**, and ask each person to read the handout and give it to their parents. Point out that thinking ahead about your own capabilities, the circumstances of the situation, and having a life jacket before going in the water or out on a boat can prevent most drownings. You can make good decisions to keep safe in and around water.

Additional Learning Activities – Water Safety Research

1. Water safety has a rich history both in the United States and in many other countries. Have your group use its research skills in the school or community library or on the Internet to explore the history of water safety activities. The research could answer these questions and more:

    - What is the earliest historical reference you can find to water safety programs?
    - What different names did you find for life jackets, and what different materials were used to make life jackets? What materials are used to make life jackets today?
    - What role does the Coast Guard play in water safety?
    - What is the United States Power Squadron? Is there a Power Squadron in your community or close to your community?
    - Who else besides humans wear life jackets?
    - What are some examples of water safety activities no longer used? Why are they no longer used?

    Ask the group to suggest other questions to include in their research.

To display the history of water safety, create a timeline that displays important dates and developments in water safety. Get a jump-start on your knowledge about life jackets by visiting this web site:
National Marine Manufacturers Association. Visit the page, "Life Jackets: It Won't Work If You Don't Wear It!" - www.nmma.org/.

Activity 2: Risks and Questions

In this activity, young people discuss what determines the safety of different acts in the water.

What You Want to Happen

Young people demonstrate the ability to:

- determine the level of risk involved in different circumstances in the water
- ask questions that determine their capabilities in the water

What You'll Need

- note pad and markers
- copies of newspaper article, "**Oak Harbor teen drowns in North Whidbey lake**" (or a similar article from a local newspaper)
- handout, "Before You Go in the Water"
- take-home handout, "Know the water. Know your limits. Wear a Life jacket."

How You'll Prepare

- Make copies of the **handout, Before You Go in the Water.**
- Make copies of the take-home **handout, Know the water. Know your limits. Wear a life jacket**.
- If possible, reproduce the handout in a smaller form—using only the three main questions—and laminate it in a way that each person can attach it to articles of clothing, put it in wallets or purses, attach it to a backpack, and so on.

Introduction

1. Ask each person, "How many of you would try to swim a mile?" Reach the consensus that some young people would try and others wouldn't. Ask, "What would determine whether or not you would try to swim a mile?" Write their responses on the note pad, and note the following if no one mentions them:

   - the nature of the water – pool vs. small river or lake
   - their own capabilities, e.g. swimming strength
   - experience, e.g. if they'd done it before (most group members won't really know how far a mile is in the water)
   - the reason for doing it, e.g., if they were dared to do it, or if they were paid to do it

   Conclude that there are many things that people would try to do only after asking themselves questions about it.

Objective

2. Tell the group that today they're going to look at some of the questions to ask themselves before going in the water.

Questions

3. Distribute copies of the **newspaper article, "Oak Harbor teen drowns in North Whidbey lake"** (or a similar article from a local newspaper); remind students of the incident.

4. Ask participants, "What questions could James Holcomb have asked himself before going into the water in order to stay safe?" Write their ideas on the **note pad**.

5. Distribute the **handout, Before You Go in the Water**, and give participants several minutes to read it. Point out which questions are the same on the handout as on the list you created in #4 above.

6. Ask your group members why each of the questions is important. The points in italics can be raised as part of the discussion.

Know the water.

- "Is the water warm enough that I can swim comfortably?" "Is there little or no current?" "Are there riptides?"
  (The colder and swifter the water, the more dangerous it is to swim in it. Rivers are especially hazardous in the spring and early summer. In some parts of the country, snowmelt makes the water colder, higher, deeper, and faster.)

- "Who will help me if I get in trouble?"
  (The number of people may not be as important as their ability to help each other if someone gets into trouble. Sometimes a group of friends may not take each other seriously in a real emergency. Chances are, fellow swimmers won't have the strength to carry a struggling swimmer back to shore and may be in the same circumstances as the one who's in trouble. Bringing and wearing a life jacket to help you float provides important protection. Swimming in a lifeguarded area is smart. It means there is someone trained to help if needed.)

- "Is the water clear of hazards the whole way?" "Can I see the bottom?"
  (Swimming in the dark or swimming where you can't see around the corner of a river makes it very difficult to plan ahead and make good decisions.)

- "Did I check for obstacles like logs, weeds, rocks, or boats before entering the water?"
  (Don't dive or jump in head-first. Remember, feet first, first time. Swimmers may bump into obstacles or be trapped by them; boat drivers may not see swimmers or obstacles up ahead.)

Know your limits.

- "Do I consider myself a good, strong swimmer?" "Do I consider myself in good shape?" "Am I tired at all?" "Have I been drinking any alcohol?"
  (All these characteristics can affect a person's performance in the water. You may consider yourself a strong swimmer but in fact not be one.)

- "Have I done this before? How many times?"
  (Some things—e.g., swimming to a dock and back—may look easier than they actually are, and unless you've done it before, you really don't know whether or not you can do it. The problem with water is there's no place to stop and rest. One time it may be fine, and the next a problem; even if you've done it before 10 times, trouble can happen on the eleventh time.)

- "Am I doing this because I really want to and no one else is pressuring me to do it?"
  (Water, though fun, can be extremely dangerous as well. It's important you make the decision to go into the water yourself.)

- "If I get in trouble, will I be able to call for help? Will I take a call for help seriously? Am I prepared to rescue someone?"
  (Even if you only think you're in trouble, call for help. Always take a call for help seriously. There isn't much time to rescue you or someone else in trouble. Call for help or get help for someone else, even if you think he or she is joking. Bring along a rescue device or life vest to help keep yourself or someone else afloat.)

Wear a life jacket.

- "Do I have a life jacket when I'm going out in a boat?"
  (A federal law requires a life jacket that fits for everyone in a boat. Many states also require children 12 years and under to wear their life jackets.)

- "Do I have a life jacket or something else to help me float when I'm going swimming?"
  (Possibly the most important thing you can do to protect yourself is to wear a life jacket. Life jackets will protect you not only when on a boat but also when swimming, especially in a lake or river where there is no life-guard.)

Add the question, "Have the friends I'm with asked themselves these same questions?" Elicit answers from the group and discuss why it's important for the friends you're with to be prepared before you go in the water. Invite students to add other questions to the list.

7. If you've reproduced the handout in a smaller form and laminated it, give these out to participants, explaining how they can use them.

Closure

8. Let the young people know if they answered "no" to any of the questions, they're at greater risk. The more questions they answered "yes" to, the safer they'll be around the water, especially if they can answer "yes" to questions in all three categories. Ask young people, "In the end, whose responsibility is it - whose decision is it - to join in different activities in the water and to be prepared?" Reach the consensus that it's their responsibility, and it's their decision to make. Say that just as with any decision, the more information they have, the more they can plan in advance, the better decision they'll be able to make. That's why answering the questions they've been discussing can help them make good decisions that will keep them safe in the water. Give students the handout**,** "**Know the water. Know your limits. Wear a life jacket.**" Encourage students to take the handout home and discuss it with their parents or guardians.

Additional Learning Activities - Assess and Build Your Water Safety Skills

1. The *Stay On Top Of The Water* Guide reminds young people of three important messages: Know the water, Know your limits, Wear a life jacket. This is a good time to assess swimming ability and water safety skills. One common water safety test is to tread water. Have students try treading water for 10 minutes. Make this test more real by treading water for 10 minutes with all their clothes on. This would match the situation of falling out of a boat fully clothed. Try this test in a lifeguarded area. If possible, try it in the water where students plan to swim. Try putting on a life jacket at the last minute. Or try putting on a life jacket once students are already in the water. If someone throws you a life jacket once you're in the water, you need to be able to put it on. You'll see how hard it is to do! Make sure the area you swim in is safe and be prepared to assist/rescue students who may not be able to complete this.

   If you're in a school, the school may offer extra credit or elective credit to take a class to improve swimming or boating skills. Youth groups may offer merit badges or certificates to learn new skills or improve skills. Consider some of these activities for your young people:
   - Take a swimming test at a community pool, YMCA, or school. How skilled a swimmer are you? Remember that your results on a test in a swimming pool don't test your ability to swim in a lake or river. Work as a group to encourage your local pool to offer teens-only classes.
   - Take swimming lessons, or swim on a regular basis to improve your swimming ability. Swimming is great for cardiovascular health, endurance, fitness, and all-around exercise.
   - Take SCUBA (Self-Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus) lessons.
   - Take a First-Aid class.
   - Take a CPR class.

- Complete a Life Guarding or Water Safety Instruction course. Check your local American Red Cross or community pool for class dates. Lifeguards need to be 15 years of age or older. If you're younger, check for a GuardStart class offered by the American Red Cross for young people 11-14 years old.
- Complete a marine safety or boating safety course. Call for information on classes offered by the Coast Guard Auxiliary (1-800-368-5647) or the U.S. Power Squadrons (1-888-FOR-USPS). You can also find this information online:

  Coast Guard Auxiliary – www.cgaux.org/cgauxweb/public/pubframe.htm
  U. S. Power Squadrons - www.usps.org

2. If the young people you're working with are looking for even more fun activities to build and practice water safety skills, check out these suggestions.

   2001 North American Safe Boating Campaign:
   Dry-Land Activities - www.safeboatingcampaign.com/dryland.htm
   In-Water Activities - www.safeboatingcampaign.com/dryland.htm
   Alcohol Awareness Activity-
   www.safeboatingcampaign.com/alcaware.htm

   American Red Cross:
   "Whale Tales," water safety activities for kids age 5-12
   www.redcross.org/hss/aquatics/whale.html.

3. Using the take-home handout, "Know the water. Know your limits. Wear a life jacket," have your group members work with parents or guardians and other family members to create a Family Water Safety Plan. If time permits, have students bring finished plans to class and share with other students.

Activity 3: Resisting Pressure

In this activity, young people use role play and practice resisting pressure from friends to take risks around the water.

What You Want to Happen

Young people demonstrate the ability to:

- identify situations around the water and elsewhere in which they might be asked to do something dangerous
- use *The Refusal Skill*™ to stay safe and avoid trouble

What You'll Need

- note pad and markers
- handout, "*The Refusal Skill*™"
- an assistant, perhaps a high-school student or one of the students in your group

How You'll Prepare

- Make copies of the **handout, *The Refusal Skill*™** . This is also a good handout to share with parents.
- Review this activity with your assistant, and practice role playing together. Be sure that you're familiar with the skill and with different role plays that relate to the young people you're teaching.
- Keep all the lists you make during this activity; you'll use them in the next activity, too.

Introduction

1. Ask participants, "What situations have you been in where someone was trying to get you to do something you thought might be dangerous?" Write their ideas on the note pad under the title "DANGEROUS SITUATIONS." To focus on situations that involve water, ask, "What situations can you think of that involve swimming or being on inner tubes, rafts, or in a boat?" Or ask, "When you think of someone drowning, what kinds of situations do you think of?"

Objective

2. Tell participants that today they're going to learn a skill that will help them make tough decisions when they're with friends around the water.

Trouble Situations

3. Role-play a situation with your **assistant**, using the following criteria:

   - The situation involves your assistant trying to get you to do something dangerous, e.g., jump off a boat while the boat is moving.
   - You use *The Refusal Skill*™ to get out of the situation.
   - Your assistant pressures you enough to be realistic but finally gives in, so that you end up using the skill successfully.

   Consider the following example (the steps of the skill are **HIGHLIGHTED**):

   Assistant: Hey, let's jump.
   You: **(ASK QUESTIONS.)** Jump? You mean jump in the water while the boat's still moving?
   Assistant: Yeah, it'll be cool.
   You: Are you kidding? **(NAME THE TROUBLE.)** That's really dangerous. **(STATE THE CONSEQUENCES.)** If I did that, the boat might hit me. I might drown.
   Assistant: Oh, come on!
   You: **(SUGGEST AN ALTERNATIVE.)** Listen, instead why don't we wait until we stop. Then we can think about it. **(MOVE IT, SELL IT, AND . . .)** *(Begin to move away.)* Listen, I'll bet I can do any jump you do, only better—even with a life jacket on.
   Assistant: I don't know. It still seems kind of cool to jump now.
   You: **(. . . LEAVE THE DOOR OPEN.)** *(Continue moving away.)* If you change your mind, I'll be up front.
   Assistant: *(Follow.)* All right.

4. Tell the group that you just used something called *The Refusal Skill*™, and that you're going to be teaching them the skill, step by step. Say that in the situation you just role-played, you stayed out of trouble and you still kept your friend.

The Skill

5. Ask your group members to tell you what you did in the role play. Write their responses on the note pad. When you're finished, distribute the **handout, *The Refusal Skill*™.**

6. Make points about each step by using an example from the list of dangerous situations and suggesting a key phrase:

- **Ask questions.**
  ("What . . .?" or "Why . . .?")
  The initial step is to ask questions to help determine whether in fact there is anything wrong with the situation.

- **Name the trouble.**
  ("That's . . .")
  Then say your reaction out loud: "The water's running high," or "That's a whole lot further than we've ever gone before."

- **State the consequences.**
  ("If I do that . . .")
  Taking chances in the water can have many different kinds of consequences: physical consequences, e.g., injury or death; family consequences, e.g., betraying trust; "inner" consequences, e.g., feeling guilty if something happens to a friend. Add that some of the consequences may relate to themselves and that other consequences may relate to others, e.g., friends or parents.

- **Suggest an alternative.**
  ("Instead why don't we . . .")
  Suggest an alternative that lets the person know you're rejecting the *activity*, not the *person*. With the participants, brainstorm a list of alternatives to doing something dangerous in the water and write their ideas on the pad under the title "ALTERNATIVES."

- **Move it, sell it, and leave the door open.**
  ("If you change your mind . . .")
  Moving away from the situation, even if it's only a few feet, helps you stay in control and also lets the other person know that you're serious. Explain different ways of selling alternatives—making the alternatives sound doable, mentioning other people who will be involved in the activity, and emphasizing the importance of the friendship. Point out that the purpose of "leaving the door open" is to let friends know that you still want to be friends.

More Modeling

7. Tell participants that now they're going to have a chance to practice *The Refusal Skill*™. Show the group how you'd like them to practice by role-playing a situation with a partner. Take the part of the skill-user and use one of the situations the group suggested earlier and recorded on the "DANGEROUS SITUATIONS" list. Choose one that's water-related. Ask participants to clarify the situation, so that everyone gets a picture of it:

    - "What's going on in the situation? Where am I? Who's there?"
    - "Who's the person asking me to do something I don't want to do?"
    - "What does the person want me to do?"

8. Now ask for suggestions at each step of the skill so the participants define the role play:

    - "What can I ask to find out what I want to know?"
    - "What can I say that I don't want to do?"
    - "What are the negative consequences of my doing that?"
    - "What's an alternative activity?"
    - "What can I say to sell the alternative, safer activity? If that doesn't work, what can I say to 'leave the door open'?"

9. Finally, role play the situation using the responses given by young people. Keep the role play simple, without pressure. After you've done the role play, ask students for feedback:

    - "Did I keep from getting into trouble?"
    - "What would have helped me to be more effective?"
    - "What was good about the way I used the skill?"

10. (Optional, time permitting) Have two group members model one more time, this time with the person who was in the previous role play acting the part of the skill-user.

Practice

11. Arrange participants into pairs. Ask them to take a minute or two, choose a situation that's water-related, and then practice the skill with their partners. Point out that both partners should choose the same situation. Ask them not to pressure each other by interrupting, but rather to give each other the chance to practice the skill. After they've completed the role play, have them switch, so the other person has a chance to practice the skill.

12. Circulate around the group and give students feedback. You can select several examples for videotaping and discussion if there's time and interest.

Discussion

13. When everyone has finished, focus discussion on the following questions:

    - "What did you like about the skill? What worked well?"
    - "Did anyone have trouble with the skill? What made it difficult?"
    - "How could using the skill be made easier?"
    - "When could you practice the skill?"

    Explain to participants that once they know the steps of the skill, they can use whatever words and style make sense to them. Point out that any skill takes practice.

14. Keep the lists you've made; you'll use them in the next activity.

Closure

15. Remind participants that they've already concluded it's not cool to do things in the water that risk their lives and the lives of others. Say that now they have a way to handle difficult situations and still keep their friends.

Additional Learning Activity – Ask An Expert

Sometimes it's hard to resist peer pressure because you don't have enough information. Young people think something is dangerous, but they're not sure. Have group members take a look around their community and identify the experts on water-safety issues. Once they know who those people are, invite an expert to visit and speak to the school class or youth group. You may be able to find:

Pool Manager	Water Safety Instructor	Coast Guard Officer/Auxiliary Member
Swimming Instructor	Power Squadrons Instructor	Lifeguard
Sheriff (Marine Patrol)	Marine Patrol	Scuba Instructor

What other water experts can your students name and find in your community?

Activity 4: Countering the Pressure

In this activity, young people practice persuading friends not to do dangerous things around the water.

What You Want to Happen

Young people demonstrate the ability to:

- identify situations around the water and elsewhere in which someone might be asked to do something dangerous
- use *The Refusal Skill*™ to persuade friends not to do something dangerous

What You'll Need

- note pad and markers
- handout, "*The Refusal Skill*™"
- an assistant, perhaps a high-school student or someone else who's credible to the young people you're teaching
- the lists you made from Activity #3

How You'll Prepare

- Make copies of the **handout, *The Refusal Skill*™** and hand it out when you're done for students to take home.
- Be sure that you've taught Activity #3 to this group.
- Display the **lists** you made from Activity #3.
- Review this activity with your assistant and practice role-playing together. Be sure that you're familiar with the skill and with different role plays that relate to the students you're teaching.

Introduction

1. Tell participants, "Last time we talked about situations in which someone was trying to get you to do something you thought might be dangerous." Now ask, "But what if you have a friend who was trying to get another friend to do something you thought might be dangerous, like roller-blade down a steep hill, or just something that person didn't want to do, like lie or steal? What if one of your friends was being pressured? What kind of similar situations have you been in?" Get responses from the group. Reach the consensus that sometimes it's difficult to resist pressure from friends in those situations.

Objective

2. Tell participants that today they're going to learn a way to persuade others not to pressure their friends. Say that they're going to use the same skill they learned last time, *The Refusal Skill*™, but they're going to use it in a different way.

Reviewing Trouble Situations

3. If you've not done the role play in Activity 3, role-play a situation with your assistant, using the following criteria; otherwise, skip down to #4:

   - The situation involves your assistant trying to get you to do something dangerous around the water, e.g., dive off the side of a shallow pool headfirst.
   - You use *The Refusal Skill*™ to get out of the situation.
   - Your assistant pressures you enough to be realistic but finally gives in, so that you end up using the skill successfully.

Bystanders

4. Review the steps of *The Refusal Skill*™, and then give your group the following scenario:

   - Five friends are on a beach at night.
   - Friend 1 dares Friend 2 to swim to an island and back.
   - Friends 3 and 4 join in and start to pressure Friend 2.
   - Friend 5 thinks it's dangerous to swim to the island but says nothing.
   - Friend 2 accepts the dare, swims to the island, but gets in trouble coming back and drowns.

   Ask participants, "Who could have kept the drowning from happening? You have Friend 1, who set up the dare. You have Friend 2, who accepted the dare. You have Friends 3 and 4, who cheered on the dare. And you have Friend 5, who thought it was dangerous to swim to the island but didn't say anything about it."

5. Discuss how each friend could have helped to prevent or not to enable a dangerous situation. Reach a consensus that Friend 5 shouldered some responsibility, too, because as a bystander Friend 5 may have been able to persuade the others to stop what they were doing but chose not to. Tell participants that that's why they need to use *The Refusal Skill*™ not only when they're being pressured, but when others are being pressured as well.

Modeling the Skill

6. Ask for a volunteer and say that the volunteer will play someone who's being pressured to do something dangerous. Role-play a situation with your assistant in which your assistant is pressuring the volunteer. Persuade your assistant to stop pressuring the volunteer. Again, illustrate the steps of the skill:

- **Ask questions.**
  (e.g., "Have you ever done this before? What if it's farther than we think?")

- **Name the trouble.**
  (e.g., "We can't see. The water's cold and we're tired.")

- **State the consequences.**
  (e.g., "If he does that, he might drown. How would we all feel then?")

- **Suggest an alternative.**
  (e.g., "Instead why don't we do something else, like play flashlight tag?")

- **Move it, sell it, and leave the door open.**
  (e.g., "I think it would be more fun to do something else that we could all do. If you change your mind, come join us.")

Practice

7. Arrange participants into groups of five, and ask them to set up water-safety situations in which one person uses *The Refusal Skill*™ to persuade someone not to pressure someone else. Use the list of "DANGEROUS SITUATIONS" for ideas. Allow 15-20 minutes to practice. Say that when they're finished, you'll call on a group to volunteer to perform their skit.

8. When everyone has finished practicing, have at least one group perform its skit. Record the situation presented in each skit.

Discussion

9. When the groups are done performing, focus discussion on the following questions, using specific examples from the different skits:

   - "What are the advantages of persuading someone not to pressure someone else?"
     (e.g., you help out a friend, you do the right thing, you may be seen as strong, you feel good about yourself)

   - "What are the disadvantages of persuading someone not to pressure someone else?"
     (e.g., you may be seen as weak, not part of the group)

   Conclude that there are many upsides to using *The Refusal Skill*™ in these types of situations and very few downsides, especially when water safety is involved.

Closure

10. Remind participants that anyone can help prevent a friend from getting into trouble around water. Say that sometimes it's difficult to stand up to friends, but that in the long run they'll feel better about themselves for doing what's right.

Additional Learning Activity – Literature Integration

"Decisions and their Consequences" is a good thematic unit in literature. Water safety issues fit well with that theme. As schools increase the emphasis on reading with students of all ages, here are some books that focus on water safety. Numbers in parentheses are the suggested ages of the reader. For this additional activity, teachers or youth leaders could:

- read aloud to their group
- encourage group members to read to younger siblings or youth
- encourage group members to read for their own pleasure
- read the book as a group, and analyze the decisions made and the consequences of the decisions in each book, or suggest different decisions that could have been made and predict the resulting consequences

1. *Blackwate*r, by Eve Bunting (4-8), HarperTrophy; ISBN: 0064408906
2. *I'm Safe In the Water,* by Wendy Gordon (4-8), Backyard Books; ISBN: 1891596063
3. *A Kid's Guide to Staying Safe Around Water,* (The Kid's Library of Personal Safety) by Maribeth Boelts (4-8), Rosen Publishing Group; ISBN: 0823950786
4. *Water Safety*, by Nancy Loewen (5-9), Child's World, Incorporated; ISBN: 1567662617
5. *On My Honor,* by Marion Dane Bauer (9-12), Yearling Books; ISBN: 0440466334
6. *Deep Waters,* by John Herman (Young Adult), Philomel Books; ISBN: 0399232354

Activity 5: Life Jackets

In this activity, young people sample different types of life jackets and work in small groups to overcome objections to wearing life jackets.

What You Want to Happen

Young people should demonstrate the ability to:

- describe different types of life jackets and how to obtain them
- identify objections to wearing life jackets
- identify solutions to those objections

What You'll Need

- several different types of life jackets – if possible, have at a minimum a water ski vest, a life vest for water sports like kayaking, and an orange keyhole type vest. You may also want to show an inflatable style vest. You may be able to borrow life vests from a water-ski or marine supply store. You could also ask students to bring their own vests from home.
- sources for purchasing life jackets (e.g., marine supply store, water ski dealer, department stores that sell sporting goods)
- note pad and markers
- handouts, "What's Your Type," "Adding Life to Life Jackets" and "Agree or Disagree?" (if you plan to use as a post-test)
- note cards if needed to write down objections

How You'll Prepare

- Make copies of the **handout, What's Your Type?**
- Make copies of the **handout, Adding Life to Life Jackets** (optional); if you can, make a poster of the handout.
- Make copies of the **handout, Agree or Disagree? (if you plan to use as post-test)**.
- Check the label or booklet for each life jacket for guidance on use and size. Use the features list as needed to point out the different elements of life jackets.
- Have on hand ways or places for young people to purchase each type, and information on current regulations.
- If you can't secure several different types of life jackets, try to acquire catalogs illustrating them. You can search the Internet for illustrations too. One helpful example is located at:
  Personal Flotation Device Manufacturers Association - www.nmma.org/.
- If you have time, prepare an activity to use the life jacket slogans. For example, make posters to put up in the room, post cards to send to friends, laminated tags for backpacks, etc.

Introduction

1. Ask participants, "How many of you think that life jackets can save people if they get into trouble in the water?" Then ask:
   - "How many of you wear life jackets when you go out on a small boat such as a raft, rowboat, canoe, or small open motor boat?"
   - "How many of you check to see that there are life jackets that fit each person before going out on a boat?"
   - "How many of you make sure that the life jackets, if you're not going to wear them, are right next to you in case of an emergency?"
   - "How many of you wear life jackets when you're on a rubber raft?"
   - "How many of you wear life jackets when you go inner-tubing?"
   - "How many of you wear life jackets when you swim in a lake or river where there's no lifeguard?"
   - How many of you have practiced putting a life jacket on while you're in the water?"

Objective

2. Tell participants that today they're going to talk about life jackets—why they're important to use, why people often don't use them, and how young people can overcome some of the objections to using them.

The Importance of Life Jackets

3. Tell participants that wearing a life jacket around the water is one of the most important things they and the people they care about can do to avoid drowning. Give each participant a copy of the **handout, What's Your Type?** Point out the five different types of life jackets. Show the different types of life jackets, asking for volunteers to model each of them. Discuss the features and disadvantages of each type.

Examples of life jacket features include:

STYLE FEATURES:	**SAFETY FEATURES:**
Color/design	Correct size – based on weight or measurement around chest Bright color, easier to see
Type	Type is appropriate for use (Types I, II, III, etc.). Type III is a good choice for many activities and is comfortable.
Front closure	Zipper vs. tie vs. buckle Zipper stays closed, warmer. Buckle is needed for high-impact activities like water-skiing.
Wide-cut armholes for arm movement	Adjustable straps to adjust fit
Material it's made of	In good shape
High-waisted vests for kayaking	Easier to wear
Hook for whistle or something else	Whistle can be used to signal for help
In-between leg strap	Won't ride up over head
Inflatable – lightweight and lays flat (must be at least 16 years old and 90 lbs. to wear inflatable)	Person inflates the jacket when needed

4. Tell students where they can purchase different types of life jackets – try to list specific examples of water-ski shops, marine supply stores, or sporting goods stores. Tell them their state laws about using life vests. Add that federal law requires life jackets that fit for anyone on board a boat. State that specific information on laws and safety is available online at:
   National Association of Boating Law Administrators - www.nasbla.org/.
   U.S. Coast Guard - www.uscgboating.org/default.asp.

Objections to Wearing Life Jackets

5. Ask young people, "Why do you think people don't wear life jackets?" Write their ideas on the pad, including the following:

   - They know how to swim.
   - They're too awkward or bulky.
   - They look stupid.
   - They give you tan lines.
   - There aren't any around when you need them.
   - Their parents don't encourage using life vests, or they don't wear them themselves.

You can create "objection cards" that offer common objections to wearing life jackets. The cards can be distributed if students have difficulty generating a list of objections. You can also use the cards in the next step.

6. Arrange young people into groups of four. Assign each group an objection, and ask them to come up with three ways to deal with that objection. Give groups five minutes to complete their task.

7. After five minutes, ask each group to report on how to overcome the objections to wearing life jackets. Consider the following:

   - **They're too awkward or bulky.**
     (Consider some of the alternative life jackets demonstrated earlier in the activity.)

   - **They look stupid.**
     (Consider personalizing or having your own life jacket so that they look cooler.)

   - **They give you tan lines.**
     (Consider wearing a shirt beneath the life jacket to eliminate the tan lines, or using an inflatable life vest.)

   - **There aren't any around when you need them.**
     (Before you leave home for a day on the water, check whether life jackets are accessible. Keep a life jacket in the car.)

   Reach the consensus that if young people really want to stay safe, they can find a way to wear a life jacket.

Closure

8. Distribute the **handout, Adding Life to Life Jackets,** or write the slogans on a large sheet of paper. Get participants' ideas for other slogans and how to use them, e.g., on posters, on labels that can be attached to life jackets, or in newspapers.

   Reinforce these major points about life jackets:
   - Life jackets can look good and be comfortable
   - If you're going out in a small boat like a canoe, kayak or motorboat, make sure there are life jackets on board that fit each person before you leave shore.
   - Keep life jackets close at hand. The best thing you can do is wear a life jacket.
   - Life jackets can keep you safe when swimming, too.

9. Distribute the **handout, Agree or Disagree?** (if you plan to use this as a post-test). Ask participants again to answer the questions honestly and not to think about what the "right" answers are. Collect the handouts and compare them with the results from the pre-test version of the handout, " Agree or Disagree?," from Activity 1 as a

measure of knowledge and attitude change. Ask participants if they've changed their minds or revised their ideas about water safety based on the *Stay on Top of the Water* program. Ask them if they've changed their water safety behavior. Remind students that they have to plan to stay safe, and they need a personal plan to follow to stay safe on water. They also need to think about what they would do if one of their friends got into trouble in the water.

Additional Learning Activities – Create Your Own Life Vest Loan Program or Your Personal Contract to Stay Water Safe

1. In the third and fourth activities in the *Stay on Top of the Water* Guide, students learned about countering pressure to make decisions, especially when the decision is potentially dangerous. Use of *The Refusal Skill*™ helped students form useful answers, even clever answers, to give to their peers. These messages can translate into effective messages for all young people.

   Review the slogans created in the "Adding Life to Life Jackets" activity. Brainstorm visual images to match the slogans. Have young people work in teams or small groups to create posters with their slogans as captions. Display the poster to the students in your group. Ask the group, "How effective is this message with young people?" Explain that group members will use the slogans they created on the "Adding Life to Life Jackets" handout to draw their own posters and put their messages on the posters. When the posters are completed, they can be displayed in a classroom, in a school display case, or in a community location.

2. Work with a local Safe Kids Coalition or parks department to start a life vest loan program at sites where youth recreate around the water. For more information, go to:
   Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center - www.seattlechildrens.org/dp
   Boat US Foundation - www.boatus.com/foundation/LJLP/
   Safe Kids Coalition - www.safekids.org

3. Since young people often complain about the "look" of life jackets, challenge your students to create their own life jacket for swimming. Special design features may be needed to encourage students to use life jackets for swimming activities. What great features can your group suggest to ensure that they and their friends wear life jackets while swimming?

4. Give your students a chance to have some fun while they learn more about life jackets. Obtain a copy of *Whales Tales* from your local Red Cross Chapter. Play the "PFD Relay" or "The PFD Game." These two activities give young people a chance to learn about different types of life jackets and get more practice putting on life jackets. Find the American Red Cross in your phone book, or find them online at:
   American Red Cross - www.redcross.org/**.**
   Click on "Your Local Red Cross" for more information.

5. The Red Cross Guide, *Whales Tales*, also invites your students to think about being prepared for an emergency. Two additional activities to try out from the guide include "Make a Heaving Jug" and "Save the Swimmer." Both of these activities offer practice in throwing personal flotation devices. A heaving jug is a homemade emergency-throwing device. Remember that some people who get into trouble in the water weren't even planning to go in. Help your students be prepared to help others, even if they didn't mean to end up in the water.

6. Order a copy of the Cold Water Kids curriculum at:
   Alaska Marine Safety Education Association (AMSEA) in Sitka, Alaska - www.uaf.edu/seagrant/amsea/

7. Intentional, safe behavior is the desired outcome for all young people when they are involved in water activities. Wearing a life jacket needs to become a behavior norm for all swimmers and boaters. Have participants create contracts (with you, a friend, a parent, or another adult) that include their personal plans to stay water-safe.

Grand Finale

Celebrate the water safety learning you've completed by strutting your stuff on the fashion show runway. The Washington State Drowning Prevention Project has created a life vest fashion show. You can prepare and present the fashion show to:

- school groups
- youth groups
- PTAs
- community service groups

You can obtain a copy of the script from the project's web site. There's also a list of contacts that have fashion show kits for loan if you live in Washington State.

Washington State Drowning Prevention Project
Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center
4800 Sand Point Way NE CM-09
Seattle, Washington 98105
206/527-5797
www.seattlechildrens.org/dp/
For a more general description of how to have a
life vest fashion show, go to:
National Safe boating Campaign
www.safeboatingcampaign.com/dryland.htm

Appendix

Activity Handouts

1. Activity 1 – Decisions and Consequences
   - Handout 1 - Agree or Disagree?
   - Handout 2 - Facts about Drowning
   - Handout 3 - Newspaper article

2. Activity 2 – Risks and Questions
   - Handout 1 - Before You Go in the Water
   - Handout 2 – Know the water. Know your limits. Wear a life jacket.

3. Activity 3 – Resisting Pressure
   - Handout 1 - *The Refusal Skill*™

4. Activity 4 – Countering the Pressure
   - Handout – *The Refusal Skill*Ô (from Activity 3)

5. Activity 5 – Life Jackets
   - Handout 1 – What's Your Type?
   - Handout 2 - Adding Life to Life Jackets
   - Handout 3 (Optional) – Agree or Disagree? (from Activity 1 above)

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Name _____ Date _____

Agree or Disagree?

Circle a), b), c), or d), depending on how strongly you agree or disagree. Circle your honest response.

1. **Once you can swim, it's okay to stop wearing a life jacket in a boat unless the situation looks dangerous.**
   a) Strongly agree b) Somewhat agree c) Somewhat disagree d) Strongly disagree

2. **Wearing a life jacket is a good idea if you're swimming in a lake or river.**
   a) Strongly agree b) Somewhat agree c) Somewhat disagree d) Strongly disagree

3. **Daring someone to swim across a small lake is okay as long as you swim with friends.**
   a) Strongly agree b) Somewhat agree c) Somewhat disagree d) Strongly disagree

4. **It's pretty easy to say no to your friends if you don't want to do something.**
   a) Strongly agree b) Somewhat agree c) Somewhat disagree d) Strongly disagree

5. **It's a good idea to try to swim in areas that have a lifeguard or are marked for swimming.**
   a) Strongly agree b) Somewhat agree c) Somewhat disagree d) Strongly disagree

6. **You can judge how far you can swim in a lake or river by how far you can swim in a pool.**
   a) Strongly agree b) Somewhat agree c) Somewhat disagree d) Strongly disagree

7. **It's usually okay to drink a few beers when you're out in a boat.**
   a) Strongly agree b) Somewhat agree c) Somewhat disagree d) Strongly disagree

8. **If your friends want to take risks, then that's their problem.**
   a) Strongly agree b) Somewhat agree c) Somewhat disagree d) Strongly disagree

9. **People in life jackets look stupid.**
   a) Strongly agree b) Somewhat agree c) Somewhat disagree d) Strongly disagree

10. **The rules of water safety are mostly common sense.**
    a) Strongly agree b) Somewhat agree c) Somewhat disagree d) Strongly disagree

Facts about Drowning

These facts are important. Knowing these facts can save your life or the life of someone you care about:

- ☑ **Most of the drownings among teenagers and young adults occur while swimming in lakes or rivers or when out in a boat without a life jacket.**

- ☑ **Most of the drownings among teenagers and young adults occur when friends are with them. It happens quickly and friends often can't help.**

- ☑ **Most of the drownings among teenagers and young adults occur when the water overpowers a swimmer's strength. For example, the water is too cold or swift or it's more than a few feet back to shore. The swimmer gets tired and can't make it back.**

- ☑ **More males drown than females, and in many states more teenagers and young adults drown than young children.**

- ☑ **Most teenagers and young adults believe they will never drown. But drowning is second only to car crashes as the leading cause of unintentional injury or death.**

- ☑ **Most drownings could be prevented if teenagers and young adults plan for the water conditions, know their limits, and wear a life jacket.**

Oak Harbor teen drowns in North Whidbey lake

HOLCOMB:

14-year-old drowns in Silver Lake.

By ERICKA PIZZILLO
Staff reporter

James Holcomb would have turned 15 on Saturday.

But less than a week before his birthday the high school athlete drowned in Silver Lake on North Whidbey while he swam with two friends, according to sheriff's deputies.

Holcomb was spending the weekend with a friend who lived by the lake.

The boys apparently were fishing Sunday morning, but decided to take a dip in the lake and swim out to a raft in the water, Sheriff's Lt. Chris Garden said.

But when the boys got to the raft, Holcomb wasn't with them.

Sheriff's deputies were called to the scene around 11:45 a.m., Garden said. That's when he called in the department's dive team.

Later, divers with the Navy's explosive ordinance division joined in the search.

Holcomb's body was found about five hours later in the murky, peatwater lake. The dark water and debris in the water made the search especially difficult, Garden said.

Holcomb was about to enter the 10th grade at Oak Harbor High School where he was a wrestler and a football player.

His wrestling coach, Rick Karjalainen, whose summer wrestling camp Holcomb attended, said the boy had a unique capacity for the sport.

He was a talented wrestler who didn't train by the book. Instead, he found his own style based on his incredible flexibility, Karjalainen said.

He was also a humorous and sensitive boy, his family said.

"You'd know when he was hurting. He couldn't hide it," John Holcomb, the boy's father, said.

But when he was happy, he couldn't hide it either. Especially with his younger brother, Joey, 6. "The living room became a wrestling ring with Joey whenever Jim learned a move," John Holcomb said. 'When he was with Joey, he was 6-years-old."

James Holcomb talked about college, his family said. He drew funny little cartoons that he stapled together in books.

The honor student's real love may have been the law.

"He said he was going to be a lawyer because he always wins his arguments," Holcomb's brother Tom said.

His family said he didn't like to be in the spotlight, but his humor made him the life of every party.

"He was kind of a card," his father said

Before You Go into the Water

To have a good time around the water, plan ahead and use good judgment. To be safe, you need to think about the water conditions, your own limits, and the use of safety gear like life jackets. Before you go into the water, ask yourself these questions. If you can answer the questions "yes," you are well on your way to being water-safe.

1. What do you know about the water? Do you…

- ☐ check how cold, high, or fast the water is running before you go in?
- ☐ look to see if there is a lifeguard to help you if you're in trouble?
- ☐ check for hazards like weeds, logs, rocks, boats or riptides before going swimming or boating? Do you keep checking as you go further in the water?

2. What do you know about your limits? Do you…

- ☐ feel confident you can swim that far? Have you ever swum that far in the same type of water? Are you tired?
- ☐ feel sure you are doing this because you really want to and no one is pressuring you to do it?
- ☐ know you've stayed away from drinking any alcohol?
- ☐ have a plan if you or a friend gets into trouble in the water?

3. When do you wear a life jacket? Do you…

- ☐ wear a life jacket that fits if you're going out in a boat, inner tube, or raft, even if you can swim?
- ☐ have a life jacket to help you float if you're going swimming?

drowning PREVENTION PROGRAM FOR teens and young adults

Know the water. Know your limits. Wear a life jacket.

To have a good time around the water, plan ahead and use good judgment. To be safe, you need to think about the water conditions, your own limits and the use of safety gear like life jackets.

Know the water.

Cold water can kill. Many lakes and rivers are cold enough to cause hypothermia, even in summer. Calm rivers can hide swift currents, rocks, and tree branches. High running rivers in the spring are most dangerous. Before you jump in, make sure you're in a designated swimming area, and remember the safest places to swim are those areas with lifeguards on duty.

- Avoid swimming or boating in high running water. Check water conditions with a raft company, boating store, local park staff or sheriff marine patrol before setting out.
- Check how cold or fast the water is running before you jump in.
- Respond quickly if someone calls for help. Your friend may really be in trouble.
- Never dive or jump into unfamiliar or shallow water. Check for submerged objects and make sure the water is at least 10 to 12 feet deep.

Know your limits.

Swimming in lakes and rivers is harder than swimming in a pool. Drowning most often happens when someone gets too tired to make it back to shore. Friends who are there are tired too and can't help.

- If you don't know how to swim well, find someone to teach you. Learn to float and tread water too. Call your local pool and ask if they have classes for young adults.
- If you are tired, rest, and stay out of the water.
- Never use alcohol or drugs while you're swimming, diving or in a boat. Alcohol's effects are heightened by the weather, water and boat movement.
- Learn what to do for a water rescue or when someone stops breathing. Learn CPR.

Wear a life jacket.

No matter how good a swimmer you are, it is easy to misjudge the water or your skills. Weather and water conditions change quickly. Once you get tired or fall in, it may be too late to put on a life jacket. Life jackets are sold in stylish designs, and they aren't as bulky as they used to be.

- Wear a life jacket when you're boating, inner tubing or rafting. Boat owners are required by law to carry life jackets in their boats. Wear one even if you can swim.
- Wear a life jacket if you are swimming in a lake or river where there are no lifeguards.
- Take a safety course if you plan to drive a boat. Call 1-800-336-2628 for details.

For more information, check out Children's website at www.seattlechildrens.org/dp/.

Children's Hospital & Regional Medical Center

Washington State Department of Health

7/00

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The Refusal Skill™

Goals of *The Refusal Skill*™

- keep your friends
- stay safe and out of trouble so you can continue enjoying life

Steps of *The Refusal Skill*™ :

1. Ask questions.
   (" What . . .?" "Why . . .?")

2. Name the trouble.
   (" That's . . .")

3. State the consequences.
   (" If I do that . . .")

4. Suggest an alternative.
   (" Instead of swimming across the lake, why don't we play marco polo here in the swimming area?")

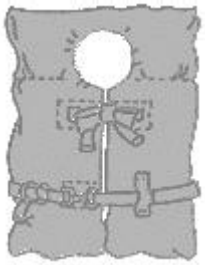
5. Move it, sell it, and leave the door open.
   (" We're going to play marco polo in the swimming area, because that looks like more fun and we can all play. If you change your mind about swimming across the lake, come join one of the teams and play with us.")

What's Your Type?

Life jackets and other personal flotation devices (PFD) give you extra buoyancy and some keep your head above water. PFDs come in five types. Make sure you select the type that matches the water activities you plan to enjoy.

Type I
Offshore Lifejacket

This PFD is designed for extended survival in rough, open water. It usually will turn an unconscious person face up and has over 22 pounds of buoyancy. This is the best PFD to keep you afloat in remote regions where rescue may be slow in coming.

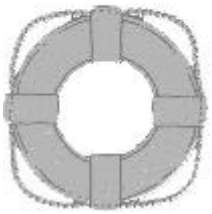


Type II
Near Shore Buoyant Vest

This "classic" PFD comes in several sizes for adults and children and is for calm inland water where there is chance of fast rescue. It is less bulky and less expensive than a Type I, and many will turn an unconscious person face-up in the water.

Type III
Flotation Aid

These life jackets are generally considered the most comfortable, with styles for different boating activities and sports. They are for use in calm water where there is good chance of fast rescue since they will generally not turn an unconscious person face up. Flotation aids come in many sizes and styles.



Type IV
Throwable Device

These are designed to be thrown to a person in the water. Throwable devices include boat cushions, ring buoys, and horseshoe buoys. They are not designed to be worn and must be supplemented by wearable PFD. It is important to keep these devices immediately available for emergencies, and they should not be used for small children, non-swimmers, or unconscious people

Type V
Special Use Device

Special use PFDs include work vests, deck suits, and hybrids for restricted use. Hybrid vests contain some internal buoyancy and are inflatable to provide additional flotation.

Adding Life to Life Jackets

Here are some ideas for sayings to attach to a life jacket or to use as a slogan:

- I wouldn't be caught dead in a life jacket.
- Think before you sink.
- If you don't like the view from under the water, wear a life jacket.
- I'd rather float than bloat.
- Smart swimmer on board.
- Why do you think they call it "life" jacket?

Now it's your turn.

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