

# Key Themes and Messages

## Water Smart® Guide

Water Smart in Lifesaving Society programs





LIFESAVING SOCIETY®

*The Lifeguarding Experts*

## WATER SMART® GUIDE KEY THEMES AND MESSAGES

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The Lifesaving Society is Canada's lifeguarding expert. The Society works to prevent drowning and water-related injury through its training programs, Water Smart® public education initiatives, water-incident research, aquatic safety management services, and lifesaving sport.

Annually, well over 700,000 Canadians participate in the Society's swimming, lifesaving, lifeguard, and leadership training programs. The Society sets the standard for aquatic safety in Canada and certifies Canada's National Lifeguards.

The Society is an independent, charitable organization educating Canadian lifesavers since the first Lifesaving Society Bronze Medallion Award was earned in 1896.

The Society represents Canada internationally as an active member of the royal Life Saving Society and the International Life Saving Federation. The Society is the Canadian governing body for lifesaving sport - a sport recognized by the International Olympic Committee and the Commonwealth Games Federation.

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# Key Themes and Messages

## Water Smart<sup>®</sup> Guide

Water Smart in Lifesaving Society programs





# Canada's lifeguarding experts

– working to prevent drowning for over 100 years.

Almost 500 Canadians die every year in water-related incidents. Most of these are preventable and occur in unsupervised settings, which is why more Canadians need the basic swimming and lifesaving skills to save themselves in an aquatic emergency.

The Lifesaving Society has a long and proud history of teaching swimming and lifesaving to Canadians.

We trace our roots to the late 19th century in London, England where we began as The Swimmers' Life Saving Society. In 1894, Arthur Lewis Cochrane brought the lifesaving skills he learned in his homeland to Canada. And he passed them along to students at Upper Canada College in Toronto, Ontario. In June 1896, 18 of his students were the first recipients of our distinguished Bronze Medallion award. Under the patronage of King Edward VII in 1904, we became The Royal Life Saving Society.

In the 1950s, we were the first Canadian organization to adopt mouth-to-mouth as the method of choice over manual methods of artificial respiration. We started our first CPR training program in the 1960s. In the 1980s, we initiated a project to design an economical CPR training manikin (ACTAR 911™), and we launched our Water Smart® drowning prevention campaign.

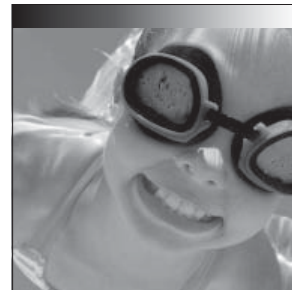
In the 1990s, the Society introduced innovative new programs including Boat Operator Accredited Training, the Junior Lifeguard Club and the Canadian Swim Patrol Program, and we launched our Aquatic Safety Management Service. We expanded our First Aid training programs and completely revamped the Bronze medal and the National Lifeguard training program to suit the needs of the new century.

In 2001, we defined the Canadian Swim to Survive® Standard and subsequently launched our Swim to Survive program to teach Canadians the minimum essential skills they need to survive an unexpected fall into deep water. Our learn-to swim program – Swim for Life® – is our latest drowning prevention initiative.

Today, we are known to Canadians simply as the Lifesaving Society, a national volunteer organization and registered charity. And while we've expanded our strengths over the past century to include research and public education, we haven't forgotten the ideals that formed the foundation of our organization.

The Lifesaving Society has always been – and will continue to be – Canada's lifeguarding experts.

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# Teaching Water Smart

*The Lifesaving Society works to prevent drowning and water-related injury. Our annual drowning research shows that many drownings and other water-related fatalities are preventable – if people would learn to avoid risky situations, modify their high-risk behaviour around water, and knew how to save themselves or others when an aquatic emergency occurs.*

## Water Smart in Lifesaving Society Programs

The acquisition of basic swimming ability is a fundamental requirement in any meaningful attempt to eliminate drowning in Canada. And we know that the best place to learn to swim is in the water. But knowing how to swim is not enough: we also need to make every swimmer “Water Smart” before they get in too deep. That’s why drowning prevention messages are an integral part of our Swim for Life program, as well as other public education programs for children.

Most people – especially children – often learn best by “doing.” And that’s why we’ve embedded drowning prevention messages in skill items and Must Sees. No more sitting around on the deck just talking about it!

Based on the drowning research and the participants in the Swim for Life® program, we have established the following drowning prevention key themes:

- Within Arms’ Reach – “If you’re not within arms’ reach of your child around the water, you’ve gone too far.”
- Swim with a Buddy – “Never swim alone. Always swim with a buddy.”
- Wear a Lifejacket/PFD – “Choose It. Use It. Lifejackets have come a long way” and “It won’t work if you don’t wear it.”
- Swim to Survive – “Learn essential swim survival skills to recover from a fall into deep water: roll into deep water; tread water for one minute; swim 50 m (in any manner).”
- Check the Ice – “Check the ice before you go on it. Measure clean hard ice in several places.”

Not only is Water Smart education embedded in the skills of the Swim for Life program, but we created special Water Smart activities and handouts specifically targeting these groups:

- Parents of children ages 5 and younger (Parent and Tot, Preschool levels)
- Children ages 7 and younger (Swimmer)
- Participants ages 8 and older (Swimmer, Canadian Swim Patrol, Adult Swimmer)

The education materials come in a variety of formats including, but not limited to:

- Colouring and drawing tasks
- Word games (e.g. crosswords, hidden words, match the words)
- Activity tasks (e.g. hands in cold water)

All Lifesaving Society affiliate delivery partners have these materials in the **Water Smart Toolkit** to help deliver the Water Smart themes and messages. Swim for Life sites incorporate them right into the Swim for Life program. These handouts are designed to go home with Swim for Life program participants, so that we reach swimmers’ families as well as the participants themselves. It is great to teach a child to wear a PFD, but the parents must also be educated about the importance of this message.

Continuous reinforcement of these messages will bring about personal responsibility. As a Swim or Lifesaving Instructor, it is your job to keep your swimmers safe in your lessons and also safe when they swim in other environments. **This resource can also be used by parents, care givers, teachers and other members of the public to be applied in other daily safety situations.**

### Notes

- The Lifesaving Society educates over 700,000 Canadians annually in our training programs, but many more never take formal lessons.
- Water Smart is our ongoing public education training, which aims to make all Canadians “water smart” – including those who never take swimming or lifesaving lessons. The education campaign is based on an analysis of our research in drowning incidents and water-related injury. Water Smart key themes and messages in the Lifesaving Society Swim for Life program are derived from this same research.

**Water Smart key theme:**  
**Within Arms’ Reach**

“If you’re not within arms’ reach of your child around the water, you’ve gone too far.”

By age group, children ages 2 to 4 have the second highest drowning risk. Most children were alone and playing near water when they fell in and drowned.

The “Within Arms’ Reach” message gives parents and caregivers specific, concrete parameters for their supervisory role in a meaningful, compelling manner. The message applies to all water environments – bathtubs, backyard pools, lakes, rivers, streams.

**Supporting tips:**

- Never leave a child alone in, on, or near water – whether it is a backyard pool, wading pool, bathtub or a lake. The drowning process can take as little as 10 seconds.
- Half of victims 2 to 4 years of age drown in backyard pools. Pool owners should ensure that fences enclose all sides of a pool, not just the three that municipal law requires (in most instances, the victim gained access to the pool from the house).
- Keep a close eye on sliding and patio doors. Ensure the doors are locked and put alarm on the door to be absolutely sure.
- Ensure all gates have a self-closing latch and that gates are locked to keep children out of the pool area when it is not in use.
- Keep safety equipment around the pool, for easy access including a reaching pole, a ring buoy or other floating objects that can be thrown to someone in need. Also, keep a cordless phone nearby for emergencies.
- Lifejackets/PFDs do not take the place of a caregiver within arms’ reach.

- Assign responsibility – Who is watching the children?

**Age-specific messages:**

**Parents of children ages 5 and younger (Parent and Tot, Preschool levels):**

- Hold my hand
- Wait for me here
- Wait for permission to go into the water
- Stay within arms’ reach
- Drowning is a silent killer and can happen in seconds
- Deep water is your child’s “chest height”

**Children ages 7 and younger (Swimmer):**

- Hold my hand
- Wait for me here
- Wait for permission to go into the water

**Participants ages 8 and older (Swimmer, Canadian Swim Patrol, Adult Swimmer):**

- We always get in here
- Look before you leap
- We always get out here
- Slide safely – feet first only

**Notes**

- Don’t be afraid to tailor the Water Smart messages to suit the age group you’re teaching and according to the time of year. For example, “Check the ice” messages are most relevant in the winter/spring, while the “Wear your PFD” message may be most relevant in the summer.
- For more information in support of Water Smart messages or activities, refer to your Water Smart Toolkit or visit us online at [www.lifesaving.org](http://www.lifesaving.org).

**Water Smart key theme:**  
**Swim with a Buddy**

“Never swim alone. Always swim with a buddy.”

**Supporting tips:**

- Few drownings occur under lifeguard supervision – play and swim at pools and waterfronts supervised by lifeguards whenever possible.
- Being alone is a contributing risk factor in many drownings – especially so for young children, non- or weak swimmers, and those with seizure disorders.
- The victim is alone in almost all drownings in bathtubs and in the vast majority of backyard pool drownings.
- You can use the Lifesaving Society’s “Buddy the Lifeguard Dog” mascot to reinforce this Water Smart® message!

**Age-specific messages:**

**Parents of children ages 5 and younger (Parent and Tot, Preschool levels):**

- Always swim with a Buddy (Your Buddy could be your friend, instructor, older brother or sister, parent, etc)
- Lifeguards and instructors are here to help you

**Children ages 7 and younger (Swimmer):**

- Always swim with a Buddy (Your Buddy could be your friend, instructor, older brother or sister, parent, etc)
- Lifeguards and instructors are here to help you

**Participants ages 8 and older (Swimmer, Canadian Swim Patrol, Adult Swimmer):**

- Always swim with a Buddy (Your Buddy could be your friend, instructor, older brother or sister, parent, etc)
- Lifeguards and instructors are here to help you

**Water Smart key theme:**  
**Wear a Lifejacket/PFD**

“Choose It. Use It. Lifejackets have come a long way” and “It won’t work if you don’t wear it.”

Over 90% of drowning victims were not wearing a Lifejacket in situations where one was called for. Many people do not wear a Lifejacket or PFD – they feel they can swim well enough: Lifejackets/PFDs are uncomfortable to wear; and they’re not cool.

Would you try to do up your seatbelt as you car was crashing? You can’t put on your lifejacket as you are falling out of the boat.

**Support tips:**

- Most people refer to personal flotation devices (PFDs) as “lifejackets.” But they are different – lifejackets have greater buoyancy and are designed to turn an unconscious person face up.
- With new colours and styles, lifejackets and PFDs are much more attractive and comfortable than they used to be.
- The law requires that each boat have on board a Department of Transport approved lifejacket or PFD. And there must be one that fits each person on board.

When selecting a lifejacket or PFD, consider:

- Appropriate size (look at label) and fit for the individual
- Government approval
- Fasteners: zippers, buckles
- Collars (especially for young children)
- Parents need to wear lifejackets/PFDs too.
- Use your child’s lifejacket/PFD as an added ‘safety net’.
- Be a role model – Wear your own lifejacket/PFD when in a boat.

**Notes**

*Water Smart key theme:*

## Wear a Lifejacket/PFD (cont'd)

*Age-specific messages:*

**Parents with children ages 5 and younger (Parent and Tot, Preschool levels):**

- I always wear my lifejacket/PFD! (Wear your lifejacket/PFD when ... (i.e. outside near open water, at the pool, in a boat, etc)
- Is it too deep for me? Do I need my PFD?

**Children ages 7 and younger (Swimmer):**

My Lifejacket/PFD Safety Check:

- Buckle up – Snaps, ties and zippers
- Snug and comfy
- PFD keeps me safe
- Get caught wearing your lifejacket

**Participants ages 8 and older (Swimmer, Canadian Swim Patrol, Adult Swimmer):**

- Lifejackets – Choose it – Use it
- Lifejackets/PFD: Proper Fit = Comfort = Safety
- I always wear my lifejacket/PFD!

My Lifejacket/PFD Safety Check:

- Buckle up – Snaps, ties and zippers
- Snug and comfy
- Get caught wearing your lifejacket

*Water Smart key theme:*

## Check the Ice

“Check the ice before you go on it. Measure clean hard ice in several places.”

The direction to check and measure the ice first reinforces that the quality of ice varies throughout a body of water and that the thickness of ice can change quickly.

Most ice-related drowning incidents occur on lakes with changing conditions due to varying temperature conditions, currents and snow requiring ice to be measured in several places.

### SUPPORTING TIPS:

- Always check ice thickness before venturing out. Snowmobiles require at least five inches of clear solid ice and cars at least eight inches to one foot of clear solid ice.
- If you break through ice – don't panic. The clothes you're wearing will trap air and keep you buoyant.
- Turn toward the direction you came from and place your hands and arms on the unbroken surface.
- Kick your feet and try to push yourself forward on top of the unbroken ice on your stomach like a seal.
- Once you are lying on the ice, don't stand up. Roll away from the break towards the direction you entered until you are on solid ice.

*Age-specific messages:*

**Parents with children ages 5 and younger (Parent and Tot, Preschool levels):**

- Stay close
- Hold my hand
- Wait for me

### Notes

**Water Smart key theme:**

**Check the Ice (cont'd)**

**Children ages 7 and younger (Swimmer):**

- Think before you go
- Can I spot the danger?

**Participants ages 8 and older (Swimmer, Canadian Swim Patrol, Adult Swimmer):**

- Fallen through Ice: Push forward onto your belly stay low – roll away

- Year after year, the majority of people who drown have no intention of going into the water, immersion is sudden and unexpected.
- 2/3 of those who drown, do so within 15 m of safety.
- 2/3 of those who drown, know how to swim.
- Self rescue – call for help.
- Cold water – Wear Lifejackets/PFD, HELP and Huddle.
- Ocean/River currents: Swim with the current.
- Fast running rivers: Go feet first and angle towards shore.

**Notes**

**Water Smart key theme:**

**Swim to Survive**

“Learn essential swim survival skills to recover from a fall into deep water.”

The Canadian Swim to Survive Standard is the minimum national standard of swimming skill for all children and an important first step to being safe around water.

The Swim to Survive Standard defines the essential minimum skills required to survive an unexpected fall into deep water:

- Roll into deep water
- Tread water for one minute
- Swim 50 m (in any manner)

**Supporting tips:**

- Swim skills need to be taught: they are not innate – they are acquired.
- Among school-aged children between 5 and 12 years of age, swimming is the second most popular activity in Canada.
- Among those over 18 years of age, swimming is the third most popular activity.
- Drowning is the second leading cause of accidental death (after motor vehicle accidents) in Canada for people 55 years of age and under.

**Age-specific messages:**

**Parents with children ages 5 and younger (Parent and Tot, Preschool levels):**

- Plan to have your child learn “Swim to Survive” skills
- Stay close
- Hold my hand
- Wait for me

**Children ages 7 and younger (Swimmer):**

- Can we get hurt? Taking care of me and my buddy
- Think before you go
- Look before you go
- Can I spot the danger?

**Participants ages 8 and older (Swimmer, Canadian Swim Patrol, Adult Swimmer):**

- Stay calm – call for help
- Cold water: Lifejackets/PFD, HELP and Huddle
- Ocean/River currents: Swim with the current
- Fast running rivers: Go feet first/Angle towards shore

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