SPOTLIGHT ON SAFEGUARDING

WORKING TOGETHER TO KEEP OUR YOUNG PEOPLE SAFE

July 2026 | Primary | What parents and carers need to know about: Water safety | Personal safety

Water safety: Helping children stay safe around water

As the weather gets warmer, many families spend more time outdoors and around water. Following several incidents involving people getting into difficulty in open water during recent heatwaves, now is a good time to think about how we can help children stay safe around water.

Why can water be so dangerous?

Many children are naturally drawn to water. They may see it as a place to play, cool down or explore. However, even water that appears calm and shallow can be dangerous. Rivers, lakes, reservoirs and canals often remain much colder than expected, even on hot days. Sudden immersion in cold water can cause panic and make it difficult to breathe or move.

Open water can also contain hidden dangers such as:

- strong currents
- slippery banks
- weeds and underwater plants
- hidden objects beneath the surface
- sudden changes in depth
- poor visibility.

Teaching children about water safety

Children do not need to be frightened of water, but they do need to understand how to respect it.

Simple messages can help children develop safe habits:

- always stay with a trusted adult near water
- never enter water without permission
- do not run near water
- never push or dare others to go into water
- wear appropriate safety equipment when needed, such as buoyancy aids
- follow signs and safety instructions.

Repeating these messages regularly helps children remember them when they are excited, distracted or playing with friends.

Drowning can happen quickly and quietly

One of the biggest misconceptions about drowning is that it is noisy and obvious. In reality, children who are struggling in water are often unable to shout or wave for help.

This is why close supervision is so important. Accidents can happen in a matter of seconds, even in shallow water.

Young children should always be supervised around water, whether they are at the beach, near a river, in a paddling pool or playing in the garden with water.

If a child gets into difficulty

The Royal Life Saving Society UK encourages people to remember that they should never enter the water to attempt a rescue.

Instead:

- call 999 immediately
- encourage the child to float on their back if they are able
- throw something that floats if available
- seek help from a lifeguard or emergency services.

Trying to rescue someone by entering the water yourself can place more people at risk.

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What every child should know about personal safety

As parents and carers, we teach our children many important skills: how to cross the road safely, how to be kind to others and how to look after themselves.

Personal safety is another important life skill that helps children recognise when something doesn't feel right, understand their boundaries and know where to get help when they need it.

The good news is that personal safety conversations do not need to be frightening or complicated. In fact, some of the most effective conversations happen naturally as part of everyday family life.

Helping children understand body safety

One of the most important messages children can learn is that their body belongs to them.

Children should understand that they have a right to feel safe and that they can speak up if something makes them feel uncomfortable. This includes helping them understand personal boundaries and that they can say "no" to unwanted touch.

It is also helpful for children to know the correct names for all parts of their body. Research suggests that children who can accurately describe their bodies are often better able to communicate concerns if something happens that worries them.

Teaching body safety is not about making children fearful of others. It is about helping them develop confidence, self-respect and an understanding of healthy boundaries.

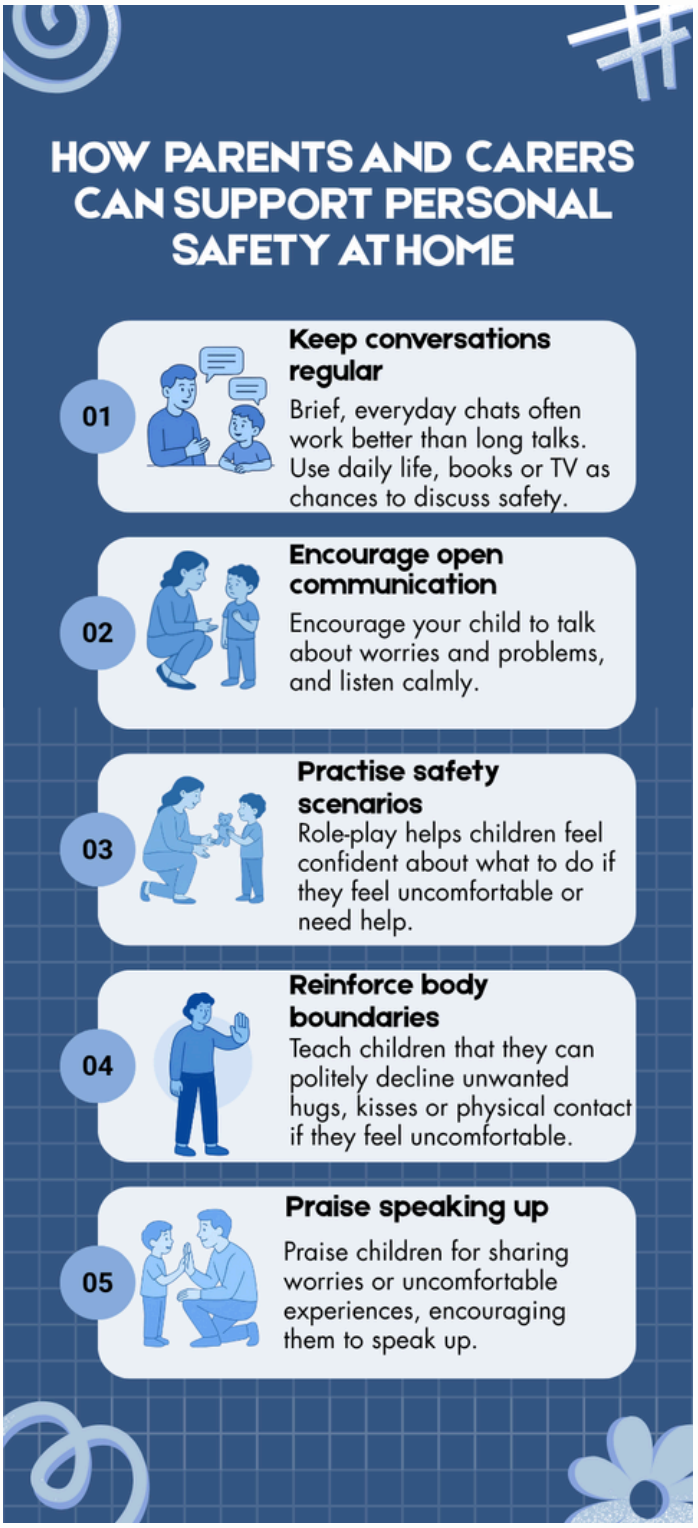
Safe, unsafe and confusing situations

Children often find it easier to understand personal safety when we move away from talking about 'good people' and 'bad people'.

Instead, it can be helpful to talk about situations that feel:

Safe – when they feel comfortable, happy and secure.
Unsafe – when they feel frightened, worried or in danger.
Confusing – when something does not feel quite right but they are not sure why.

Helping children understand that confusing feelings matter is particularly important. Sometimes children cannot explain exactly what is wrong, but they know something does not feel right. Encouraging them to talk about these feelings helps them learn to trust themselves and seek support.



Safe secrets, unsafe secrets and surprises

Surprises, like birthday presents or special treats, are fun and temporary but secrets can be different.

Surprises are shared, but unsafe secrets are kept hidden and can make someone feel worried or upset.

Children should never keep a secret that makes them uncomfortable or that someone asks them to hide from trusted adults.

Teach your child that it is always okay to tell.