Lorimer at the heart of Fostering

Water Safety Tips

Water safety week

14 - 25 Jun 2025.

Swimming in open water in the UK poses several serious dangers, even for confident swimmers. One of the most significant risks is cold water shock. Unlike swimming pools, open water in the UK remains cold throughout much of the year, often below 15°C. Sudden immersion in cold water can trigger an involuntary gasp reflex, rapid breathing, and even heart problems. This shock response can make it extremely difficult to breathe or stay afloat, even for experienced swimmers. In addition to the cold, unpredictable water conditions add to the danger. Rivers may have strong undercurrents, and the sea can hide rip currents that quickly pull swimmers away from the shore. Tidal changes can also happen rapidly, potentially leaving swimmers stranded or swept into deeper water.

Another major concern is the limited visibility and hidden hazards beneath the surface. Open water often conceals rocks, sharp debris, tangled weeds, or sudden drop-offs, all of which can injure swimmers or trap them unexpectedly. Water quality is also a concern. Many open water areas in the UK can be contaminated with pollution, including harmful bacteria, sewage, or blue-green algae, leading to illness or infection. Furthermore, open water locations typically lack lifeguards, meaning there is no immediate help available if someone gets into trouble. Overconfidence and poor risk awareness are common, especially during hot weather when open water looks inviting. For all these reasons, swimming in open water in the UK should always be approached with caution, preparation, and proper safety measures.



Lorimer at the heart of Fostering

Call, Shout, Don’t Go.

That means the first thing you should do is shout for help and call an adult or emergency services.

Don’t jump in the water yourself—it might not be safe! Instead, try shouting for help and calling 999 or 112

Once help is on the way, try staying calm and knowing what to do can really help save someone’s life

Lorimer at the heart of Fostering

The Water Safety Code is a set of simple, key guidelines designed to help people stay safe in and around water. It’s especially promoted in the UK by organisations like the Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK) and the RNLI (Royal National Lifeboat Institution). The code can be applied to any type of water—rivers, lakes, canals, seas, and even swimming pools. Here's the Water Safety Code in four easy steps:

Stop and Think – Spot the Dangers

Before going near water, take a moment to assess the risks. Look out for:

Deep, cold water
Fast currents or tides
Slippery or unstable edges
Hidden objects under the surface
Signs warning against swimming



Stay Together - Stay Safe.

Always go with others—never swim alone.

This is especially important for children.

Make sure someone knows where you are

Supervise younger people at all times

It’s safer and more fun to be with others

In An Emergency - Call 999

If someone is in trouble:

Call 999 immediately and ask for the coastguard (if at the beach) or fire and rescue (for inland water)

Do not enter the water yourself—throw them a float or something that floats





Float to Live

If you fall in or find yourself struggling:

Fight the instinct to panic or swim hard

Lean back, extend your arms and legs, and try to float

Control your breathing and call for help

Swimming in open water in the UK is risky, with 236 accidental water-related deaths in 2023, and 63% of those occurring in inland waters like rivers and lakes. Men made up 83% of the fatalities, and 44% were linked to recreational activities such as swimming or walking near water. Many deaths happen during warmer months, with June, July, and August accounting for a large number of incidents.

These waters can be cold, deep, and unpredictable, with strong currents and hidden hazards. People often underestimate the dangers, especially in summer when open water looks inviting. The rise in deaths during June and even October shows that risks exist outside the traditional summer peak.

Lorimer at the heart of Fostering