

Fight or Float first?

This simple activity gives the group an idea of the differences between fighting against the water when in shock and using the Float first survival response.

Use this activity to think about how you body responds and why knowing how to Float first is so important.

1

Divide into two groups and have a timer set for 90 seconds.

Tell one group that they will be moving as much as they can – jumping around and shaking their arms and legs.

Tell the other group that they will be staying perfectly still, while breathing deeply and calmly.

3... 2... 1... Go!

2

At the end of the 90 seconds, let them see the differences between the two groups – one exhausted, one relaxed.

3

Ask the participants what they would do if they fell into the water?

Now is time for the big reveal! Explain that their natural response if they fall into the water will be to thrash about, but then they'll end up like group 1 – exhausted.

This will make them much more likely to swallow water.

The best chance of survival is to do as little as possible, like group 2. Floating for just 60-90 seconds allows the effects of panic or cold water shock to pass.

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The Royal National Lifeboat Institution (UK) developed this fight or float activity and have a great short clip showing the difference between floating and fighting against the cold when in the water:

<https://rnli.org/youth-education/education-resources/upper-secondary/respect-the-water-fight-or-flight>



How to Float first

Float first gives you the best chance of survival if you're in trouble in the water. Whether you fall in or get caught in a river current or coastal rip, knowing how to respond in the first two minutes can be the difference between life and death.

1

Float first



- Lie back with your ears underwater, chin up
- Move your hands to help you float
- It's okay if your feet sink
- Ignore your instinct to swim

2

Breathe normally



- Relax
- Slow your breathing to help calm down
- Breathing will get easier

3

Signal for help



- Raise your arm
- Shout for help

4

Survive by swimming or floating



- Swim to safety if you can
- Float when it's not safe to swim
- Hold onto anything that helps you float
- Keep clothes on to stay warmer



Objects that sink and float

This activity introduces “buoyancy” – a force that pushes objects up to keep them floating.

Materials

A variety of objects that will float or sink, a variety of balls of different sizes, a water table/large bucket.

Activity

Demonstrate floating and sinking and talk about what these words mean.

Prediction

Children select objects in groups, display objects they think will float/sink.

Record prediction and discuss possible reasons.

Test prediction – find out which objects float, which sink.

Results

Record results - discuss.

Why have some floated and some sunk?

What do you think helped them float/sink?

Q&A

How can objects that float help people to float in the water?

What items have the children used that can help them to float?

What other flotation items have they seen? E.g. lifejackets, boogie boards, pool noodles, life rings.

Notes

Buoyancy is a force that pushes up on objects, and the more surface area the object has for the force to push up on, the greater chance it will float and the more weight it will hold. In addition, more water is displaced when the surface area of an object is large.

Check out more floating activities in the Float first Junior Primary resource.



Float first open water scenario

This activity can be run in groups using role play or discussion.

Set the scene

Three people are fishing on board a boat out at sea, no one is wearing a lifejacket. One person is drinking alcohol. The boat is swamped by a huge rogue wave and capsizes. It remains floating upside down in the water. You are too far out to swim to shore.

What would you do? Come up with a step-by-step plan or role play how the group should respond.



Q&A

What does H.E.L.P. stand for? Heat Escape Lessening Position
Where do we lose a lot of heat? Head, chest, arm pits and groin
What is hypothermia? A lowering of the core body temperature

Check out more floating activities in the Float first Youth and Adults educational resource.

Responses to cover

- Protect airways when falling into the water (keep your mouth closed and cover mouth and nose with hand).
- Remember to Float first:
 - Float first on your back to recover from the panic or cold water shock
 - Breathe normally – Relax and slow your breathing to help you calm down
 - Signal for help - Identify anything that will help you communicate or get attention
 - Survive by swimming or floating:
 - Find additional flotation (such as a bucket, chilly bin or lifejacket from the boat). If found, the lifejacket can be put on
 - To help keep float in H.E.L.P.* or form a Huddle as a group
 - Swim towards the boat (as a group if possible) and climb on top to get out of the water
- Reassure and check in on each other regularly.

