

**Safety and Rescue
in a
Sheltered Water Environment**

You, the environment and the others on the water

Before you go for a paddle it is really important to think about your current skills and experience, as well as your aspirations for your time on the water. It is safest to get on the water with other people, so it's important to consider their skills and experience too. Matching your skills and experience to the environment is a really important part of being safe on the water. You may wish to ask yourself some questions:

- How do I know my skills are ready for the paddle?
- Do I think the others in the group will also be able to paddle here?
- What is the weather forecast for my location?
- How will the weather affect the paddle? Will it make it easier or harder?
- Have you checked the river levels or tide information and do you understand what this means?
- Have I considered where we will get on and off the water?
- Can we get out along the way or turn back if we choose to?
- Are there any hazards we need to know about or deal with along the way?
- Are we ready if the conditions change?
- If we have to do a rescue, will we be able to manage it and have we practised it recently?
- Have we packed a bag with a spare layer, water, food and a first aid kit? Have we brought a shelter that could cover everyone?
- If we have to signal or call for help along the way, do we have the means to do this quickly and effectively?

If it is difficult to answer some of these questions, it could be an indicator that you might need to reconsider your plan.

Often you can look for a simple solution such as:

- Finding an alternative place to paddle
- Paddling in a sheltered location, rather than venturing out onto more exposed water
- Asking a more experienced paddler to help you
- Contacting a qualified coach or leader to take you on the water

If you can't find a simple solution to your problem, it might be advisable to avoid getting on the water.



Wearing the right clothing and bringing the right equipment

The weather and the water temperature will affect what we choose to wear when we are out on the water. There are lots of options available and all have their benefits and drawbacks. Considering how warm you will be if you do end up in the water is really important and having a plan for how to stay warm if it is colder than expected is a great idea.

Simple thermals or sportswear

Pros - Often the cheapest option and readily available. Can work if used as a layer underneath a paddling jacket and trousers.

Cons - Only an option when the weather is at its warmest. If you get the layers wet, you will likely be cold very quickly.

Wetsuit

Pros - A great upgrade from wearing thermals. Much warmer and more durable. Keeps warmer for longer when wet.

Cons - Still can be cold if you are not active on the water. A thinner or poor fitting wetsuit will still lead to you being cold in spring/autumn/winter.

Paddlesport jackets and trousers

Pros - Lots of choice at all price ranges. Very versatile and often a great choice for being on the water in a range of conditions year round.

Cons - You will still get wet if you are in the water in separate jacket and trousers, which could lead to you being cold.

Drysuit

Pros - Often the warmest option for paddling in spring, autumn and winter. Durable and long lasting.

Cons - Usually the most expensive option.

Whatever we wear, it is important to think about whether we have anything that could get caught when we are paddling or maybe climbing back onto our board or boat. Making sure that we keep things like rescue tapes, karabiners and key/phone pouches zipped away in a PFD pocket will help to remove these potential snags and keep our profile "clean".



Our Equipment

When we head out onto the water, there are a few essentials that we can take with us

- **Phone or a means of calling for help** - Make sure this is in a waterproof case!
- **Spare layers** - Great if you are feeling a bit cold whilst you are out on the water.
- **Something to eat and something to drink** - Keep your energy levels up and stay hydrated.
- **First Aid Kit** - Having a simple first aid kit can be a great piece of mind when you are out on the water.

Depending on what you are doing on the water, you may also wish to consider carrying a map and an emergency shelter. If you are using any kind of rope or sling when you are on the water (should you need to tow one of your party because they are tired) then having a knife can give piece of mind in the rare circumstance of the rope/sling becoming tangled.

Take care when carrying your boat or board

We need to make sure that we look after ourselves when we are lifting and carrying our equipment:

- Remember to keep your back straight when lifting and carrying and let the legs do the hard work of picking up the boat or board
- If you can, share the load by carrying your boat or board with someone else
- Lifting a boat on and off the water can strain your body so, if it is possible, you may wish to slide it on/off the water (take care to avoid bank erosion!)
- Take real care when getting your boat or board off from a vehicle, it's typically better to get help when doing this rather than trying to do it on your own
- When carrying equipment in the wind, working as a team usually helps, rather than trying to do this on your own

Find out more in the [BCAB Manual Handling for Paddling eLearning](#).



Safety Principles

There are some simple principles that we can use to keep ourselves safe when we are out on the water. These can be applied to any environment that you might choose to paddle

Communication

Can everyone hear me if I say something or shout?

Line of Sight

Can I see everyone and can someone see me?

Avoidance

Have we considered any hazards on the water? What will we do if we encounter one? Are we getting too spread apart as we paddle?

Positioning

Where am I most useful and what can I do from here?

What if we need to do a rescue?

Sooner or later someone is going to capsize or fall off their board. It's really normal and typically isn't anything to worry about as long as you are ready and have practised your rescues.

Being aware of your priorities in a rescue is really helpful and means you can avoid a small issue becoming bigger and more complex.

Self

On the water you are the most important person. You can't help others if you are not safe.

Team

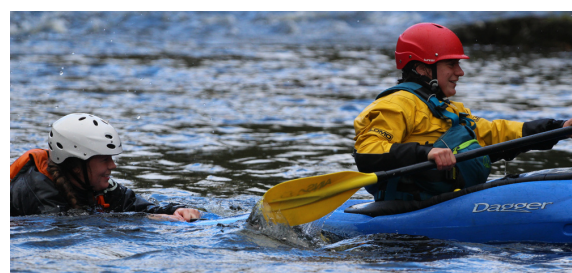
The safety of the team is next most important and they can typically work together to help in a rescue.

Casualty

The person requiring any help or assistance comes as our next priority.

Equipment

Looking after or recovering kit and equipment is at the bottom of our list of importance.



When we actually come to perform a rescue, we have a range of options available to us. Some of these options present more risk to the rescuer/casualty than others and, where possible, we should always aim to choose the lowest risk rescue we can. However, for some situations, the higher risk option may actually be the most effective. Deciding on which rescue to use is something that you will develop as your experience grows

Shout Rescue

- Keep it simple
- Give clear and loud instructions to the person needing help
- They may be able to swim to the side on their own with just some simple encouragement
- If approaching from the water, consider if it is safe to make direct contact with the swimmer (they may make you capsize)
- A low risk option that can be used alongside any other rescue technique

Supporting videos demonstrating this rescue technique can be found [here](#)



Reaching Rescue

- A helpful option if you are on the bank
- Effective to help assist a paddler when they are near to the shore
- Reaching with a paddle is a lower risk option and is releasable
- Make sure you adopt a strong stance and consider your footing

Supporting videos demonstrating this rescue technique can be found [here](#)



Assisting a Swimmer

- The swimmer can simply hold on to your board or boat
- Effective to help move a swimmer back to their own craft
- An option for bringing a swimmer back to the bank
- If contact is made with the swimmer then this increases the risk to the rescuer
- We may be able to give enough support by simply paddling alongside the swimmer and giving encouragement

Supporting videos demonstrating this rescue technique can be found here



Deep Water Rescue

- Consider your own safety when approaching the person in the water
- Can the person in the water help with their own rescue?
- If you are finding it difficult on your own, can someone else help you?
- Keep any paddles close to hand
- Consider a different approach if the rescue feels hard to do or puts strain on you physically

Below is an example of a kayak paddler rescuing another kayaker

Supporting videos demonstrating this rescue technique can be found here



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Below is an example of kayak paddler rescuing a canoeist

Supporting videos demonstrating this rescue technique can be found [here](#)



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Below is an example of a SUP paddler rescuing another SUP paddler

Supporting videos demonstrating this rescue technique can be found here



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Below is an example of a canoe paddler rescuing another canoeist

Supporting videos demonstrating this rescue technique can be found here



Assisting another paddler

- If you are only moving a short distance to the bank, use a simple option involving no additional equipment
- If you are using additional equipment it must be releasable
- Can the person being assisted do anything to help?
- Can the person being assisted help to steer their craft?

Supporting videos demonstrating this rescue technique can be found here



Self Rescue

- If you are unable to swim to the side, can you take charge of your own rescue from the water?
- Many craft have different options for self rescue, practice is essential for all paddlers
- Some craft such as canoes and kayaks may need assistance from others to help with the rescue

Supporting videos demonstrating this rescue technique can be found [here](#)



Entrapped Paddlers

- Many rescue techniques can be performed from your craft
- Consider how others can support during this situation
- Can others stabilise the paddler so that they can free themselves
- It may be required to enter the water to give assistance to the paddler, however this is very high risk

Supporting videos demonstrating this rescue technique can be found here



Unconscious Paddlers

- Many rescue techniques can be performed from your craft
- Consider how others can support during this situation
- It may be required to enter the water to give assistance to the paddler, however this is very high risk
- Once the paddler is stabilised and upright, check they are breathing and call for help
- It is likely that the unconscious paddler will need others to stabilise them once they are upright
- Work as a team to tow and move the casualty to the shore
- Once on the shore, begin emergency procedures and first aid if required

Supporting videos demonstrating this rescue technique can be found [here](#)



Bank Based Rescues

There are also some rescue options (such as shouting, reaching and throwing a rope) that we can use if we are on the bank when we need to do a rescue. These are covered in more detail in this separate [guidance available here](#).

The lowest risk option when you are helping from the bank is to simply encourage the person in the water to swim to the side. The rescuer, in this instance, gives clear and simple instructions and can "shout" from the bank to tell them what to do and where to go. They would combine this with some clear hand/arm signals and may change where they are standing, to encourage the person in the water to swim towards them.

When your swimmer is close to shore, you may be able to reach them with your paddle. This allows you to move them to an easier place to get out of the water, such as a set of steps or shallower water. This rescue option can be really helpful if you are standing on a jetty or on the bank when other paddlers are on the water.

Throwing rescues can be used if the paddler is further away and can't swim to the side. However, throwing a rope into the water does increase the risk and, most of the time, a simpler rescue that is lower risk is a better choice..

Supporting videos demonstrating this rescue technique can be found here



Throwing Rescue

If you have decided that using your throwline is the right rescue option, you can go through the following steps:

- Attract the swimmer's attention to tell them you are going to throw a rope
- Open the bag, take a handful of rope and throw it behind you
- Hold the bag tight in your throwing hand and the rope in the other
- Shout to the swimmer to let them know you are going to throw the rope and throw it so that it lands within reach (it doesn't matter if you throw it past them, they don't need to hold the bag, just the rope)
- Tell the swimmer to get hold and to turn onto their back, head first to the bank
- Adopt a strong stance and pull the rope in towards you, hand over hand, until they are at the side
- Once they are at the side, help them to get out. Rather than offering your hand, you can reach them with a paddle which lowers the risk to you as a rescuer and reduces your chances of being pulled into the water. If they do pull the paddle too hard, it is easily released by letting go if you need to

Supporting videos demonstrating this rescue technique can be found here



What if there is an emergency?

If there is a serious emergency on the water, being able to manage it and call for help is critical:

- Find a safe landing
- Locate yourself on either a map or through using your phone/gps
- Use your mobile phone or radio to call for help (you could also blow your whistle to attract attention). Call 999 (or 112) giving clear information about your situation
- Be mindful of keeping the casualty warm as well as yourself. What do you have that could help with this? A group shelter can be really helpful in this situation
- Consider the difficulty that the emergency services may have in accessing your location. Is there anything you can do to help them find your position?

Finding out more

There are a wealth of resources available from British Canoeing to help further your knowledge and development in this area.

More supporting resources can be found here [British Canoeing Safety Resources](#)

You may also find the following links helpful

- [Equipment for Paddling](#)
- [Information on wearing buoyancy aids for paddleboarding](#)
- [Understanding SUP leashes](#)
- [SUP Leash Safety](#)
- [Information on Inland waterways](#)
- [Weir safety for beginners](#)
- [Weather and Tides](#)

