



Water Safety

Children's Services Policy No 2.12

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Aim

To prevent accidents and illness related to water hazards in Council's Children's Services including: swimming pools, wading pools, containers that can catch water and other water hazards.

Background information

In Australia drowning is the leading cause of preventable death for children under the age of 5 years. Children can drown in as little as 5cm of water. The obvious risk is a swimming pool; however other hazards include wading pools, baths, toilets, spas, dams, rivers, ponds, nappy buckets, pet drinking bowls and water troughs.

For safe and healthy development, all children should be well supervised while being exposed to opportunities to explore their natural environment in order to extend their skills and abilities. This should be offered through active exploration and discovery including water play for under school aged children, and water based recreational activities for school aged children.

Water education and conservation programs have grown exponentially in Australian educational settings. We need to consider environmentally sustainable practices and policies in order to facilitate children's awareness and understanding on water conservation.

Relevant legislation

- [Education and Care Services National Regulations](#)
- [Education and Care National Regulations Amendment Regulations 2025](#)
- [NSW Work Health and Safety Act 2011](#)
- [NSW Work Health and Safety Regulation 2017](#)
- [Children \(Education and Care Services\) National Law \(NSW\)](#)

Resources

- [Kids Health Fact Sheets](#) – The Children's Hospital at Westmead, Child Health Promotion Unit – Child Health and Safety
- Kidsafe NSW Inc. – [Water Safety](#)
- NSW Office of Local Government – [Water Safety](#)
- [My Pool Safety – How to Comply with pool Fencing Regulations NSW 2019](#)
- [NSW Fair Trading – Pool Fencing Requirements](#)
- [Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority - National Quality Standard](#)
 - **Quality Area 2:**
 - Standard 2.2 – Element 2.2.1 and Element 2.2.2.

Note: In this policy “staff” and “educators” refers to staff employed within Children’s Services by Willoughby City Council.

Important notes

- This policy is to be read in conjunction with the **Children’s Services Policy 3.2 - Excursions**.
- At no time does this policy allow under school aged children to attend an excursion for the purpose of water activities, for example but not limited to swimming, fishing, or boating activities.
- For the purposes of this policy, under school aged children refers to all children who have not yet attended their first day of formal education or school or a vacation care program. For this age group “water experience” refers to water “play only” activities within the childcare centre and is not limited to, water trough and gardening experiences.
- It is **not** the role of Council’s Children’s Services staff to instruct swimming or water proficiency to children. Such instruction is the responsibility of parents/carers who are strongly advised to engage the services of professional swimming instructors.
- Staff are required to adhere to relevant water restrictions when planning water experiences for children.

Knowledge of potential hazards and planning of activities assist in providing safe water experiences for children. The planning of all water related experiences will include age appropriateness for the activity as well as active and interactive supervision by staff for all children at all times.

All potential hazards and risks are to be identified, managed and assessed by developing appropriate strategies to prevent accidents, injury or illness. Also, consideration must be given to ensure safe and hygienic practices are practised with all water based activities.

Children under school age

- Under school aged children will not be taken on excursions to bodies of water where the risk cannot be mitigated, including and not limited to swimming pools, dams, creeks, rivers and beaches.
- Direct close supervision of children is to be maintained at all times when a water experience is being offered.
- Water and water play equipment is to be clean and hygienic; and should not be able to hold more than 300mm of water.
- Water containers are to be emptied immediately after use.
- Staff are to ensure that equipment is stored appropriately to prevent water being collected in the equipment when raining.
- Staff are to check the outdoor area before children arrive to ensure safety.
- Other water hazards are to be safely covered with purpose designed tight fitting lids on buckets and/or made inaccessible to children such as nappy buckets and face washer buckets. When these are in use, staff are required to be in direct supervision and are responsible for emptying immediately after use.
- When using baths, they are to be supervised at all times including during filling and emptying immediately after use. Plugs must be made inaccessible when not in use.
- Where a water hazard is identified within the risk assessment for an excursion, such as a water feature at the zoo, correct ratios as stipulated in the **Children’s Services Policy 3.2 - Excursions** are to be followed. Alternatively, the water hazard must be avoided and documented on the risk assessment as to how this will take place. (For further details and restriction on excursions please refer to this policy).
- Where staff take under school aged children on walks within the local community they are required to ensure that there are no identified water hazards, such as a dam

or river within close proximity of the walk and the presence or absence of any identified water hazard must be identified on the risk assessment for that route or location.

- All open drains are to be covered with a grill.
- Staff will talk to children about the dangers of water and water hazards and provide parents and caregivers with information related to the dangers.
- Ensure that the service/facility is using water appropriately and is environmentally aware.
- Staff are to encourage children on water saving throughout the day (e.g. turning taps off and using half flush).
- The service is to embed water safety messages into the educational program.
- Buckets used for cleaning are to be emptied immediately after use. No cleaning buckets are to be left in areas that are accessible to children.
- Ensure water troughs or containers for water play are filled to a safe level for all children.

School aged services

- A risk assessment must be conducted and pre-approved by the Children and Youth Services Team Leader and/or Community Life Manager in conjunction with Council's Work Health and Safety Business Partner (see **Children's Services Policy 3.2 - Excursions**) for all water based activities and excursions.
- Parents/carers must provide written approval for their child to be involved in or attend any water based activity or excursion.
- Parents/carers must state their child's swimming ability and level of water safety proficiency in order for their child to attend activities involving swimming, canoeing, paddle boating or other water based activities.
- To attend any excursion to any activity involving swimming, canoeing or similar type activity all children must be in grade 3 and be able to swim a minimum of 25 metres.
- If the water activity requires, then all children and staff must wear appropriate safety apparel, flotation devices, water safety vests, helmets etc.
- On arrival and in preparation for any water based recreational activity where swimming, canoeing or similar type activity is involved, staff must first conduct an initial assessment of each child's swimming ability to ensure their capacity is to the level of approval for their inclusion.
- Children unable to swim cannot attend excursions involving swimming, canoeing, or similar type activities but are able to attend water based activities "not" involving swimming, for example but not limited to, travel on Sydney ferries (or equivalent licensed passenger vessels), beach picnics and sports, water safety, recreational and educational activities.
- Staff accompanying children on water based recreational activities where swimming, canoeing or similar activities are involved must be proficient swimmers themselves.
- At least one staff member supervising a water based recreational activity must hold a current first aid and resuscitation qualification.
- Staff accompanying children on water based and recreational activities where swimming, canoeing or similar activities are involved must actively participate, interact and be constantly vigilant in their supervision levels. Staff should also be competent swimmers.
- Refer to the **Children's Services Policy 3.2 - Excursions** for required staff to child ratios.