For the attention of Parents and Guardians

**Children/Young People’s safety around lakes, rivers and bodies of open water**

Dear Parents,

**We want to alert parents and young people of the potential dangers and risk to life of playing near and on frozen bodies of water in Bedfordshire.**

**We would ask all parents and carers to remind their children of the dangers of ice, and why they must keep away from it.**

Last year an incident within the West Midlands sadly claimed the lives of four young people after they fell through the ice of a frozen lake. This incident is a stark reminder to us all of the dangers of open water, especially during the winter months.

During the winter months the cold weather can lead to sections of our rivers, lake ponds and canals freezing over. Due to the relativity mild winter climate within the UK frozen bodies of water should always be treated as a significant hazard.

Whilst we understand the temptation to walk across or play on the frozen water, last year's incident in the West Midlands serves as a stark reminder of the dangers associated with frozen water.

The advice of the Bedfordshire Drowning Prevention Group is **to never go on to the ice under any circumstances**. Whilst the ice may appear to look stable at the bank side, the thickness of the ice can change significantly within a very short distance. If you were to fall through the ice it can be extremely dangerous due to the cold temperatures of the water and the possibility of currents pushing you under unbroken ice.

The Royal Life Saving Society UK offer advice for winter water safety, with simple steps to keep safe during the winter:

1. Never go onto the ice to play, to retrieve an object, or a pet.
2. Never enter the ice to rescue somebody, call 999 and ask for the Fire and Rescue Service.

**What to do if YOU accidentally fall through ice:**

* Stay calm and shout for help.
* Spread your arms out across the surface of the ice in front of you.
* Lie flat and use your arms to pull yourself over the ice towards the shore.
* If the ice on the water breaks, try to make your way to the bank or shore, breaking ice in front of you as you go.
* If you find yourself stuck and unable to escape, wait for help. Stay as still as possible to conserve your energy. Bring your arms close to your sides and keep your legs together, while keeping your head out of the water.
* When you are safely out of the water it is important to go to hospital for a check-up.

**What to do if you see SOMEONE ELSE fall through the ice:**

* Shout for help, call 999 and – if the incident involves inland water – ask for the Fire Service. At the coast, ask for the coastguard.
* Do not go onto the ice to attempt a rescue.
* Call out to the casualty and encourage them to stay calm.
* To try to reach the person from the bank, use a rope, pole, tree branch, clothes tied together or anything else that can extend your reach.
* Lie down flat on the bank, to avoid slipping or being pulled in.
* If you cannot reach them, try sliding something that floats – like a football or large plastic bottle – to them, to help them float.
* If the casualty is too far away, DO NOT try to rescue them yourself. Wait for the emergency services to arrive. Continue to remain calm and reassure the person.

Please also see the attached Factsheet [The Dangers of Frozen Water Factsheet | StayWise](https://staywise.co.uk/public/resource/the-dangers-of-frozen-water-factsheet)

Visit [WWW.Staywise.co.uk](http://WWW.Staywise.co.uk) for more learning resources that you can use at home provided by the Emergency Services .

** what3words**

We are encouraging everyone to download what3words as this helps us to identify a location when it is not addressable e.g. by a lake or a rural country road. The App can be downloaded for free onto a mobile phone. More information can be found at www.what3words.com

* If you are in a rural area and are unsure of the exact location, try using what3words.
* This will give you 3 keywords to give to the 999-call operator. This enables emergency services to know your exact location and the best access point to send help.

Despite the obvious safety risks, Fire Service have no authority to stop people being near open water, but if you have concerns of safety or anti-social behavior, we would ask you to report this through to the Police non-emergency number on 101.

If someone is in trouble and needs help in an emergency, please call 999.

Kind Regards

Stacey Moore

Community Safety Officer

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service

