Pre-K Water Safety Classroom Package

Three short, dry-land lessons for children about ages 3 to 5: Stop. Stay back. Ask first. Get a grown-up.

At a glance

AGES
About 3 to 5 (pre-K, preschool, Head Start, child care). Use your judgment; children develop at different rates.

LESSONS
3 lessons, about 10 to 15 minutes each

GROUP SIZE
Whole class at circle time, or small groups of 4 to 6

WATER NEEDED
None. Every activity is done on dry land, with no pool, tub or water.

The package teaches four habits young children can practice: **Stop. Stay back. Ask first. Get a grown-up.** Children also learn that water places, even a bathtub or a bucket, need a grown-up.

What this package does not do. It does not teach swimming, and it does not make any child safe around water on their own. Children are never asked to help someone in the water; their job is to get a grown-up. Keeping children safe near water is always an adult's job: close supervision, barriers around pools and, for open water, life jackets. Your program's policies and your state's child care licensing rules come first.

How to use it

- **Whole class.** Teach each lesson as a 10 to 15 minute circle time. Lessons 2 and 3 need some open floor space.
- **Small groups.** Groups of 4 to 6 give every child more turns in the sorting game and the Freeze game. Small groups work well for children who need extra practice or are learning English.
- **Order and pace.** Teach the lessons in order, one to three days apart, over one or two weeks.
- **Repeat it.** Young children learn rules by doing them many times. After the three lessons, use the chant and the Freeze game for a few minutes before water play days, field trips, warm weather and after long breaks.
- **Send it home.** Send the family note (Printable E) home after Lesson 3, with each child's coloring sheet.

Learning goals

By the end of the three lessons, most children will be able to:

1. Point to or name water places, including small ones like a bathtub or a bucket, and say or show that water places need a grown-up.
2. Stop when they hear or see the stop signal, and stay back from the edge of pretend water.
3. Ask a grown-up before going near water, with words ("May I?") or the class signal.
4. Name or point to a grown-up who keeps them safe, and show how they would shout and point to get a grown-up.

Where these goals come from. WaterWiseKids wrote these learning goals, the classroom phrases and the activities for this package. They put national safety guidance into words young children can practice. They are not quotes from the organizations cited below, and the package is not aligned to or endorsed by any standards body or organization.

Safety notes for teachers

Read these before you teach. They are the cited facts behind the lessons.

- **Why this age.** According to the CDC, "More children ages 1–4 die from drowning than any other cause of death" (CDC, Drowning Facts).
- **Small amounts of water matter.** The California Childcare Health Program says young children can drown in as little as one inch of water, and calls for careful, direct and constant supervision of young children in or near any body of water, including a tub, wading pool, shower, pool, water table or even a bucket (CCHP, Prevent Drowning).
- **Adults watch, closely and constantly.** The CDC advises designating a responsible adult to supervise closely and constantly when children are in or near water, including bathtubs, and notes that drowning happens in seconds and is often silent (CDC, Preventing Drowning). For young children, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends staying within arm's length, which it calls "touch supervision," at bath time or swim time (AAP, HealthyChildren.org).
- **"Ask first" comes from the Red Cross.** The American Red Cross advises teaching children to always ask permission to go near water (American Red Cross, Water Safety).
- **Toys are not safety gear.** The AAP says floaties, water wings and inflatable toys "do not prevent drowning" (AAP).
- **Swim lessons help, and supervision still matters.** The AAP says water competency and survival skills training through swim lessons can help reduce drowning risk for children ages 1 to 4, and that swim lessons don't make kids "drown proof" (AAP, Swim Lessons).

Rules for teaching this package

- Use no real water. The "pretend pond" is blue paper, a blue blanket or tape on a dry floor.
- No child plays a person "in the water," and no child lies down in or near the pretend pond. Use a puppet or stuffed animal for stories.
- Do not teach young children to reach, throw things or go into water to help anyone. Their job is to stop, stay back and get a grown-up.
- Keep the tone calm and matter-of-fact. The goal is a habit, not fear.
- If a child shares a frightening water experience or a loss, listen calmly, don't press for details, and follow your program's procedures for letting families and support staff know.

Teacher preparation checklist

- [ ] Read the whole package, including the safety notes.
- [ ] Check your program's policies, and your state's licensing rules, on water activities and on what to share with families.
- [ ] Print the picture cards (Printable A), one set per group, and the water and dry place cards (Printable B). Cut them apart.
- [ ] Print the coloring sheet (Printable C) and the "My grown-up" sheet (Printable D), one per child, and the family note (Printable E), one per family.
- [ ] Make the pretend pond from blue paper, a blue blanket or painter's tape on the floor. Keep it dry.
- [ ] Clear an open space for the Freeze game in Lesson 2.
- [ ] Pick the class "ask first" signal (for example, a raised hand) and a quiet alternative to shouting (for example, waving both arms or holding up the "Get a grown-up" card).
- [ ] Ask families how they say "stop," "water" and "grown-up" at home, and practice those words.
- [ ] Check each child's IEP or IFSP and plan the adaptations you will use.
- [ ] Decide which staff member will check in with a child who finds the topic upsetting.
- [ ] Optional: a puppet or stuffed animal for Lesson 3, and quiet music for Lesson 2.

Materials

Everything is paper or classroom basics. None of it uses water.

- Printable A: five picture cards (Stop, Stay back, Ask first, Get a grown-up, A grown-up is watching)
- Printable B: nine place cards (six water places, three dry places)

- Printable C: "Color the water places" coloring sheet, one per child
- Printable D: "My grown-up" drawing and tracing sheet, one per child
- Printable E: family take-home note, one per family
- A pretend pond: blue paper, a blue blanket or painter's tape (dry)
- Two sorting spots: two hoops, mats or pieces of paper on the floor, one with a hand-written "Dry" label
- Crayons; optional puppet or stuffed animal; optional music

The three lessons

The "Say" boxes are suggested words. Use your own voice, and keep sentences short.

Lesson 1: Water places need a grown-up 10 to 15 min

Goal: children point to water places and say or show that water places need a grown-up.
You need: Printable A ("A grown-up is watching" card), Printable B place cards, two sorting spots.

1. **Gather (1 min).**

   > **Say:** Today we are going to talk about water. Water is fun. And water is a place where we need a grown-up.

2. **Show and name (3 min).** Hold up each water place card, one at a time.

   > **Say:** What is this? Is there water here? Yes! A bathtub has water. Water places need a grown-up.

   > **Children say:** Water places need a grown-up.

   Do the same with the bucket, wading pool, pool, pond and beach. Point out that a bucket or a bathtub counts, even with only a little water.

3. **Sort (5 min).** Put the "A grown-up is watching" card on one sorting spot. Leave the other spot for dry places. Children take turns choosing a place card.

   > **Say:** Does this place have water? If it does, put it with the grown-up card. If it's dry, put it over here.

   If a child places a card in the wrong spot, ask: "Is there any water there?" and let them move it.

4. **Chant (2 min).** Teach the class chant with the three gestures you will use all week: Stop is a flat palm held out in front of your chest; Stay back is one big step back; Ask first is a hand raised high.

   > **Chant together:** Water, water, I see you. I stop. I stay back. I ask my grown-up too.

5. **Close (1 min).**

   > **Say:** Who can point to a water place? Where does your grown-up need to be when you're near water? Right next to you!

Check for understanding: each child points to one water place and says or shows "grown-up."
Repeat: sort the cards again in small groups during the week.

Lesson 2: Stop, stay back, ask first 10 to 15 min

Goal: children stop on a signal, stay back from the edge of pretend water, and ask before going near it.
You need: the Stop, Stay back and Ask first cards; the dry pretend pond; open floor space; optional music.

1. **Warm up (1 min).** Say the chant from Lesson 1 together.
2. **Teach three moves (3 min).** Show each card and its gesture.

   > **Say:** Stop: hold your hand out flat, like a stop sign. Stay back: take one big step back. Ask first: raise your hand up high and say, "May I?"

   > **Children say:** Stop! Stay back! May I?

3. **Freeze at the pond (6 min).** Point to the pretend pond.

   > **Say:** This is our pretend pond. It's just paper, so it's dry. We're going to practice what we do near real water.

   Children walk or dance around the room. When the music stops, or you hold up the Stop card, everyone freezes. Children near the pond take one big step back and raise a hand up high.

   > **Children say:** May I go near the water?

   Answer some children with "Not right now. Thank you for asking first!" and others with "Yes, and I'm coming with you," then walk over and stand right beside them. Play three or four rounds.

4. **Talk about it (2 min).**

   > **Say:** Why do we ask first? Because grown-ups keep kids safe near water. Water can be dangerous, even a little bit of water. So we always ask a grown-up first.

5. **Close (1 min).** Do the three moves once more: palm out, step back, hand up high. (Children who are seated can lean back for "stay back.")

Check for understanding: the child stops on the signal, steps back from the pond's edge and asks with words or the signal.
Repeat: play one round of Freeze at the pond before outdoor play on warm days or before a field trip.

Lesson 3: Get a grown-up 10 to 15 min

Goal: children name a safe grown-up and show how they would shout and point to get one.
You need: the Get a grown-up and A grown-up is watching cards, the dry pretend pond, a puppet or stuffed animal (we call it Pip here; use any name).

1. **Our grown-ups (3 min).**

   > **Say:** Who are the grown-ups who keep you safe at school? At home?

   List the answers: teachers, the director, family members and others. Make sure every child can name or point to at least one grown-up at school.

2. **Pip's ball (4 min).** Use the puppet. Put a paper ball on the pretend pond.

   > **Say:** This is Pip. Pip is playing ball near the pond. Oh no! The ball rolled into the water. What should Pip do?

   Take answers, then guide:

   > **Say:** Pip stops. Pip stays back. Pip gets a grown-up!

   Have Pip say: "Teacher! My ball is in the water!" Then answer as the grown-up:

   > **Say:** Thank you for getting me, Pip. I'll get the ball. You stay back.

   Point out that Pip did not reach for the ball.

3. **If a friend is in the water (3 min).**

   > **Say:** What if Pip sees a friend fall into the water? Pip does not go in. Pip does not reach. Pip shouts for a grown-up and points. Helping in the water is a grown-up job. Your job is to shout and point.

   Practice together: point toward the pond and call out.

   > **Children say:** Help! Grown-up! Come!

   Children who prefer not to shout can wave both arms or hold up the "Get a grown-up" card. Use the puppet only; no child acts out being in the water.

4. **Review (2 min).** Hold up all five picture cards in turn and let children say or show each one.

5. **Close (1 min).**

   > **Say:** You learned four things: Stop. Stay back. Ask first. Get a grown-up. You're going to show your family at home!

Send home the family note (Printable E).

Check for understanding: the child names or points to a safe grown-up, and says or shows "get a grown-up" when Pip sees water.
Repeat: retell Pip's story with a new problem (a toy boat, a hat blowing toward a pond) every few weeks.

Adaptations

Follow each child's IEP or IFSP and the advice of their therapists first. These ideas fit most classrooms.

Emerging language and pre-readers

- Pair every phrase with its picture card and gesture. Accept pointing, a gesture, a sign or a single word as a full answer.
- Use families' words for "stop," "water" and "grown-up" alongside English.
- Let a buddy model the move first, then have the child try it.
- No reading is needed. Read the card words aloud each time.

Sensory needs

- Tell children before you start music or a loud "Help!" practice. Keep music quiet.
- Offer a quiet way to "get a grown-up": waving both arms, holding up the card, or a sign.
- Let children sit at the edge of the circle, wear headphones or hold a fidget.
- Make the Freeze game slower (walking only) for children who find fast movement overwhelming.

Mobility needs

- Seated or wheelchair version of the Freeze game: palm out to stop, lean or roll back to stay back, a hand raised high to ask.
- Keep wide, clear paths and put the pretend pond where every child can reach its edge.
- Children can choose cards by pointing or eye gaze. Don't move a child's body for them unless their plan says to.

Attention

- Split any lesson into two 5 to 7 minute parts on different days.
- Give one job at a time, and use the same words every time.

Observation checklist

Watch during the lessons and repeats. Mark ✓ on their own, **H** with help, or **–** not yet.

Child	Points to a water place	Stops on the signal	Stays back from the pond's edge	Asks first (words or signal)	Names a safe grown-up	Shows "get a grown-up"

Keep completed checklists with your confidential class records; don't post or share them. This checklist records classroom practice only. It does not measure whether a child is safe around real water, and it is not a swimming or water competency assessment.

Printables and family note

Open a sheet PDF for one handout, or the printable sheets PDF at the top of the page for the complete set. Free to print and copy for classroom, child care and family use.

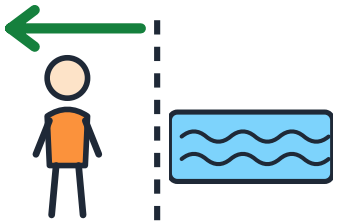
A. Picture cards

Cut apart. Use one set per group.



Stop

Hand out flat like a stop sign



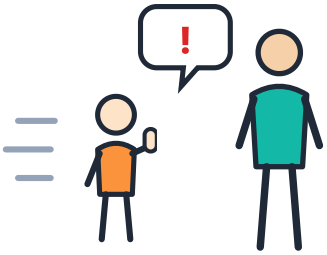
Stay back

Take a big step back



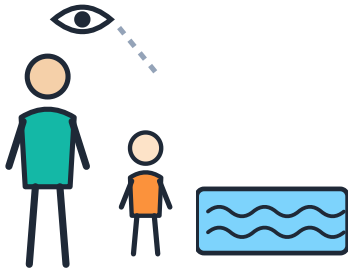
Ask first

May I go near the water?



Get a grown-up

Shout and point

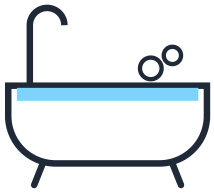


A grown-up is watching

Water places need a grown-up

B. Water places and dry places

Cut apart for the Lesson 1 sort.



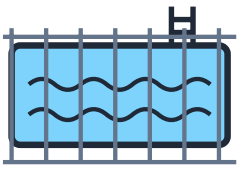
Bathtub



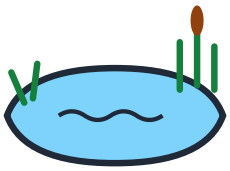
Bucket



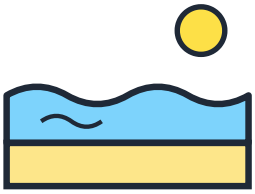
Wading pool



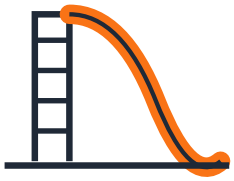
Pool



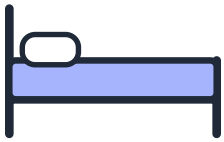
Pond



Beach



Slide



Bed

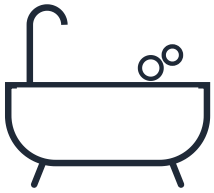


Books

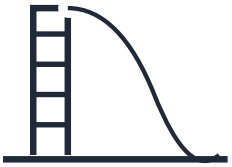
C. Color the water places

Name:

Color the places that have water. Water places need a grown-up!



Bathtub



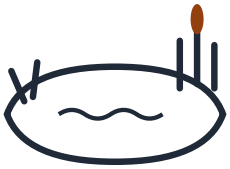
Slide



Bucket



Books



Pond



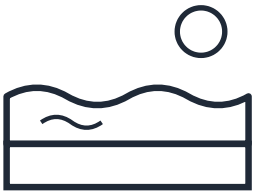
Bed



Wading pool



Blocks



Beach

D. My grown-up

Name: _____

Draw a grown-up who keeps you safe near water. Then trace the words.

My grown-up

STOP

STAY BACK

ASK FIRST

GET A GROWN-UP

E. Family note: what we learned about water safety

Dear families,

This week our class practiced four water safety habits: **Stop. Stay back. Ask first. Get a grown-up.** Your child learned that water places need a grown-up, including bathtubs, buckets, pools, ponds and the beach. Ask your child to show you the moves!

What grown-ups can do, from national health and safety organizations:

- Watch closely and constantly whenever your child is in or near water, including the bathtub (CDC). For young children, stay within arm's length, which the American Academy of Pediatrics calls "touch supervision" (AAP).
- Never leave a filled, open-top water container unattended, and empty buckets, wading pools and other containers whenever they're not in use (AAP). Young children can drown in as little as one inch of water (California Childcare Health Program).
- Floaties, water wings and inflatable toys do not prevent drowning (AAP). Near lakes and rivers, children should wear a life jacket (AAP).
- A home pool needs a fence at least 4 feet high on all four sides, with a self-closing, self-latching gate (CDC, AAP).
- Swim lessons can help reduce drowning risk, and children who have had lessons still need close, constant supervision (CDC, AAP).
- Learn CPR. CPR skills could save someone's life in the time it takes for paramedics to arrive (CDC).

Practice at home: before bath time or a trip to a pool or beach, ask, "What do we do near water?" Your child can answer, "Stop, stay back, ask first, get a grown-up."

These lessons did not teach swimming, and they do not make any child safe near water alone. A grown-up watching is what keeps children safe.

Teacher: _____ **Class:** _____

Sources: CDC Preventing Drowning (cdc.gov/drowning/prevention); AAP HealthyChildren.org, Drowning Prevention for Curious Toddlers and Swim Lessons; California Childcare Health Program, Prevent Drowning (cchp.ucsf.edu). Checked October 12, 2026. From the WaterWiseKids Pre-K Water Safety Package, version 1.0, waterwisekids.com/educators/

Sources

Each statement credited to an organization links to that source; other suggestions are WaterWiseKids's own. Sources were checked on October 12, 2026. WaterWiseKids is not affiliated with or endorsed by these organizations.

- CDC, Drowning Facts (page dated January 27, 2026; checked October 12, 2026). www.cdc.gov (https://www.cdc.gov/drowning/data-research/facts/index.html)

- California Childcare Health Program (UCSF), Prevent Drowning (updated June 2024; checked October 12, 2026). cchp.ucsf.edu (https://cchp.ucsf.edu/resources/health-safety-notes/prevent-drowning-0)
- CDC, Preventing Drowning (page dated September 29, 2025; checked October 12, 2026). www.cdc.gov (https://www.cdc.gov/drowning/prevention/index.html)
- American Academy of Pediatrics, HealthyChildren.org: Drowning Prevention for Curious Toddlers: What Parents Need to Know (updated May 18, 2026; checked October 12, 2026). www.healthychildren.org (https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/Water-Safety-and-Young-Children.aspx)
- American Red Cross, Water Safety (no date shown; checked October 12, 2026). www.redcross.org (https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies/water-safety.html)
- American Academy of Pediatrics, HealthyChildren.org: Swim Lessons for Children: When to Start & What to Consider (updated May 18, 2026; checked October 12, 2026). www.healthychildren.org (https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/Swim-Lessons.aspx)