

# Water Safety

## Preparation

No matter what level of water safety you will be training your dog, you will need a few basic guidelines to prepare yourself properly.

Always wear beach-shoes, aqua-socks, old tennies or some form of protection on your feet. If you are unfamiliar with the underwater terrain, you could step on anything--broken glass, fish hooks, dangerous marine life, or whatever.

Wear a swim suit, or shorts and t-shirt which you won't mind getting wet in. Even if you don't plan to enter the water, unexpected things can happen at the beach. Be sure to bring towels along.

Always wear a life jacket when performing water exercises which involve you getting into swimming depth water with the dog. Also wear a life jacket in the boat or kayak--you never know what could happen.

Tie up your hair, wear "kroakies" on your sunglasses, and make sure any valuables are tucked away safely. Don't wear valuable jewelry into the water. A dog could easily rip a necklace from your neck with a swipe of his paw. Once you lose something in the water, it is often gone for good.

The water amplifies the rays of the sun, be properly coated with sunscreen, if you burn easily. The shoreline is also a good place for nasty insects, like deerflies and mosquitoes to congregate. It would be a good idea to bring along insect repellent for yourself AND your dog.

Training for water safety is just like training for anything else. You want to break down each exercise into small parts. Make sure your dog can do all of the things you will ask him to do in the water on land first.

Make sure that your dog has fluencies in all of the behaviors involved in a particular exercise before you ask him to put those behaviors together in the form of a water safety exercise. For example, if you want to have your dog take a line out and tow a cramped swimmer to shore, you should have already taught him the basics of a retrieve (take it, hold it, give), a go out to a target, and a recall, both on land and in the water, and of course, the dog must know how to swim.

Until you are sure that your dog will retrieve whatever you throw into the water, don't throw anything you need out there unless it is attached to a line. When using long lines in water training, use only the floating nylon line (ski rope).

Always train with a buddy (human companion). Even the best of swimmers can have accidents around the water.

When getting the dog accustomed to doing water recalls, retrieves or swimming, it is best to entice him along, parallel to the shoreline. If the dog perceives that the bottom suddenly drops off, and he can't touch any more, he will be less likely to "be brave" than if he can wade gradually deeper, little by little.

Work together and take turns, and respect everyone else's need to practice in the water, too. There is only so much shoreline, and only so many boats and life jackets, everyone can not use them at once. Practicing in groups and taking turns is the most effective way to get your water exercises done.

Remember that during your free time, the beach may not be occupied, and it would be a great time for you and a few friends to get in some beach time.

All dogs know how to swim. They just don't KNOW that they know how to swim. Do NOT throw your dog into the water to force him to realize that he can swim. Work gradually and build his trust. Think about how terrified you felt when you were just learning to puppy paddle.