

Informed Consent Toolkit



Toolkit to assist practitioners to implement informed consent procedures for basic swimming and water safety lessons in low resource settings.

Contents

Introduction.....	2
Informed Consent Form	4
Health Screening Additional Questions	7
Medical Professional Advice Form	9
Glossary.....	10

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Introduction

This guidance has been developed to assist practitioners to implement informed consent procedures for swimming and water safety lessons in low-middle income settings.

Teaching basic swimming and water safety skills to school-age children aged 6 years and older reduces drowning risk. Implementing basic swimming and water safety skills lessons carries a risk of harm. Informed, verbal or written consent from parents or guardians for children to participate in basic swimming and water safety skills lessons is essential as they need to understand the inherent risks involved with participation and agree to participation. In addition, parent or guardian input is essential to help identify the health and development history of the child.

The World Health Organization’s publication *Preventing Drowning: Practical guidance for the provision of day-care, basic swimming and water safety skills, and safe rescue and resuscitation training (2022)* recommends that organisations conducting basic swimming and water safety skills lessons should ensure that informed consent is obtained (*Practical Guidance 3: Gain documented, verbal or written informed consent for children to participate in basic swimming and water safety skills lessons from parents or guardians*). This toolkit is designed to help practitioners implement this best practice recommendation.

How to use this toolkit

This toolkit has three key tools that can be used to assist you to manage swimming sites safely.

Tool	Use
Informed Consent Form Template	A template used to obtain informed consent and conduct basic health screening.
Health Screening Questions Notes	Additional questions and supporting information to be used if a potential health condition is identified.
Medical Advice Form	A template used for seeking professional medical advice if a potential health condition is identified.

What is informed consent?

Informed consent is when a person fully understands what they are agreeing to, including associated risks.

Why is informed consent important?

Ethical considerations: The process of getting consent acknowledges a person's individual freedom of choice to participate in an activity and gives an opportunity for an individual (or their caregiver/guardian) to set personal boundaries. All staff involved in the delivery of a project have a duty of care to ensure those participating are comfortable doing so. Obtaining consent helps to ensure that personal needs are identified, i.e., ensuring religious customs are taken into account.

Legal protection: Getting consent is an important element of any project activity, without obtaining it, legal requirements may not be fulfilled. They protect organizations from potential legal liabilities by providing evidence that individuals were informed about the nature of the activity and willingly gave their consent to participate.

Consent is not a secondary consideration but underpins all of the work done as part of a given project activity and so needs to be fully understood before any work is undertaken.

What is the informed consent process?

For a person to be fully informed of what they are consenting to, they need to be aware of the details of the programme activity, and aware of associated risks. Organisations should also provide information on how they are mitigating these risks.

Initially, organisations may wish to engage with communities to explain the rationale behind the activities (the benefits of learning basic swimming and water safety skills), followed by more focused discussion with caregivers on the details of the programme. The engagement process may include caregivers attending project activities prior to signing up or viewing pictures/videos so that they can understand what activities the children will be doing.

How can consent be given?

It is important that consent is recorded. Normally this would be on a consent form, which is a printed or digital document, but in situations where this is not possible it could also be recorded by video or audio.

The consent form introduces the organisation[s] conducting the project, why the proposed actions are to be undertaken and how associated risks will be managed. The consent form requests the name and contact details of the person and a signature verifying that consent has been given.

Who do we need to gather consent forms?

When working with children (defined by the UN as under the age of 18) we must gather consent from their parent, caregiver or guardian for them to take part in the planned activity.

How should we gather consent using a consent form?

1

Ensure that you have read through the consent form in advance of the project work and ask all project delivery staff members to do the same. Give staff members responsible for collecting consent the opportunity to ask questions about any elements of the form which are not clear.

2

Introduce the consent form verbally, carefully reading it out loud to parents/caregivers/guardians and children well in advance of the planned activities. If possible, supply a copy of the printed consent form, translated to the relevant language.

3

Ensure that parents/caregivers/guardians have understood the content of the form, give an opportunity to ask any questions, and ask them to sign the form before any activities take place.

4

Thank parents/caregivers/guardians for their time and reiterate how they can get in contact with the team, should they have any further questions or decide to withdraw their consent or take their child out of planned activities.

Health Screening Questions

Some participants may have health conditions that require your standard operating procedure to be adapted in order for them to participate. It may also mean they are not able to fully progress or complete all of the outcomes. The health screening questions may be used to identify potential health conditions that may increase the risks associated with learning to swim.

The purpose is not to automatically exclude participants with potential health issues, but rather to determine if professional advice is needed or if adjustments to lessons need to be made. In some cases after seeking additional professional advice you may not be able to provide the adjustments required to include a participant, in this case efforts should be made to include them in any elements that they are able to safely participate in, such as classroom-based water safety lessons.

Informed Consent Form

This informed consent form is intended for you to use as a template for obtaining informed consent for participation in basic swimming and water safety skills lessons. The template should be reviewed carefully and modified as required to ensure that the information is factually correct for a specific programme.

INFORMED CONSENT FORM TEMPLATE

Introduction

Drowning is one of the leading causes of death globally. This course of basic swimming and water safety lessons is aimed at providing swimming skills (the skills include breathing, orientation, floating and moving through water) to allow persons to self-rescue, and promote safer water usage. Through providing basic swimming and water safety skills, our organization, _____, will contribute to preventing drowning. The programme will take place at _____ (name of the SS venue), on _____ (day) at _____ (time) for the period _____ (day, month, year start and finish date).

The basic swimming and water safety lessons will be conducted by _____ (name and surname of the instructor or organization name), who can be contacted at _____ (contact details or instructor or organization). _____, Programme personnel are trained to teach basic swimming and water safety skills. In addition, the personnel can perform first aid and water rescue and have undergone background checks. Our organization performs continuous monitoring and evaluation of the instructors and assesses their instruction reports regularly.

Risks & Mitigation of Risks

Basic swimming and water safety skills lessons take place in different types of aquatic environments, and there are risks which you should be aware of. These include risk of injury, abuse or rarely death. Risk for harm may be due to a variety of causes including risky behaviour, environmental hazards, medical conditions, and unforeseen factors.

Our organization and the instructors are committed to assess and manage the risks appropriately. We follow any country regulations relevant to teaching basic swimming and water safety skills, child protection and working with children.

Personal Information

This personal information will be used for contacting participants and will follow all privacy regulations. Information used for reporting or research purposes will not include any identifiable information.

Participant Name	
Participant Surname	
Participant Gender	
Participant Date of Birth	

Guardian/Parent Name & Surname	
Guardian/Parent relationship to participant	
Contact Number	
Physical Address	
Email Address	

Health screening questionnaire

It is important to understand and share any health condition that may influence your child's ability to participate in the programme.

1. Does the child sometimes have seizures, become rigid, or lose consciousness? (Seizure Disorder)	Yes	No	Unsure	Notes
2. Does your child experience any breathing difficulties? (Breathing)	Yes	No	Unsure	Notes
3. Compared to other children, does the child have difficulty seeing, either in the day or at night? (Sensory Capabilities)	Yes	No	Unsure	Notes
4. Does the child appear to have difficulty hearing? (Sensory Capabilities)	Yes	No	Unsure	Notes
5. Does the child struggle to speak? (Can he/she make himself/herself understood in words? Can he/she say any recognizable words?) (Speech Development)	Yes	No	Unsure	Notes
6. Is the child's speech in any way different from normal (i.e. not clear enough to be understood by people other than his/her immediate family)? (Speech Development)	Yes	No	Unsure	Notes
7. Compared to other children, does the child have any serious delay in sitting, standing, or walking? (Motor Developmental)	Yes	No	Unsure	Notes
8. Does the child have difficulty in walking or moving his/her arms, or does he/she have weakness and/or stiffness in the arms or legs? (Motor Development)	Yes	No	Unsure	Notes
9. When you tell the child to do something, does he/she struggle to understand what you are saying? (Cognitive Development)	Yes	No	Unsure	Notes
10. Does the child struggle to learn to do things like other children his/her age? (Cognitive Development)	Yes	No	Unsure	Notes
11. Is there any other relevant condition or challenge that the child has that may present difficulty in participating in swimming training?	Yes	No	Unsure	Notes

Declaration

I hereby agree that the child participates in the Basic Swimming and Water Safety Programme, and I am aware of the potential risks associated with this programme, and I have provided accurate information.

In the event of an emergency where the participant requires medical assistance, I hereby authorize programme personnel to take all necessary and appropriate actions, including seeking the assistance of professional services.

Signature

Signature

I hereby authorise the programme personnel to take images, audio recordings and videos of the child for the purpose of teaching and learning, marketing, and fundraising.

Signature

What if a potential health condition is identified?

If the answer to any of the questions asked during health screening is 'yes', a medical professional may give an opinion on whether or not the participant is suitable for taking part in swimming lessons or if any adjustments may need to be made.

If a participant has a potential health condition, it may be necessary to revise the instructor to student ratios downwards so that they can take part in lessons safely and effectively. Some students may require one-to-one tuition. Teachers may require specific training to teach swimming safely and effectively to children with certain health conditions.

Due to known or potential health conditions, some children may only be able to learn parts of the basic swimming and water safety skills programme – for example, some children may be able to learn some basic water safety skills on land but have a health condition that prohibits them from taking part in swimming lessons safely. In other cases, a child may have a health condition that prohibits them from safely taking part in basic swimming and water safety skills lessons at all.

If the participant has any medication that may be required in an emergency situation (for example, an inhaler if they are asthmatic), it should be ensured that this is always present and easily accessible while they are taking part in the lessons.

NOTE:

If a potential health issue is identified, professional medical advice should be sought where possible to help determine if a child can safely take part in basic swimming and water safety skills lessons. Adjustments should be made to accommodate specific health needs where relevant. The safety of the child should always be the first priority.

Data Retention and Security

The nature of recording informed consent and conducting health screening means that personal sensitive data will be recorded. This includes contact information and health information. There may be legal guidelines that govern how this information is processed and stored.

Personal data should be stored securely with access controlled to only those who require it. It should be retained only for the period in which it is required. In the context of informed consent and health screening for basic swimming and water safety skills lessons, this may be for the period while the lessons are taking place or longer if the participant has been involved in an incident.

When the data is no longer required it should be securely destroyed.

NOTE:

It is important to safeguard personal sensitive data and ensure that it is securely destroyed when no longer required.

Health Screening Additional Questions

If any of the health screening questions are answered as 'yes', additional questions can be asked to gain greater understanding. These questions may assist a medical professional to determine whether a child may be able to safely take part in basic swimming and water safety skills lessons and if so, if any adjustments may need to be made.

Question	Notes
<p>1. Does the child sometimes have seizures, become rigid, or lose consciousness?</p>	<p>Seizures mean uncontrollable jerking or shaking and may arise from conditions like epilepsy, mental disabilities, head injuries etc.</p> <p>In very young children they can also arise from high fevers. A seizure typically lasts between 3-10 minutes – although they may last longer - and may involve the child wetting themselves.</p> <p>An important consideration with respect to swim skills training is that exposure to water – particularly cold water – can trigger a seizure.</p> <p>Important aspects for follow up questions if a child is reporting as sometimes having seizures include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How often does it occur? When was the last seizure? Does the child take medications for seizures? What are the known trigger conditions for children who have repeated seizures?
<p>2. Does your child experience any breathing difficulties?</p>	<p>Breathing difficulties may reflect problems with a child's lungs or airways, or their heart.</p> <p>Important follow up questions for children who are reported to have breathing difficulties include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does your child run out of breath when exercising? Does your child suffer from asthma? Is the asthma triggered by allergies (for example, pollen, chemicals, secondary smoke) exercising, cold water? Does your child use medicine or an inhaler? Has your child been admitted to hospital for breathing difficulties?
<p>3. Compared to other children, does the child have difficulty seeing, either in the day or at night?</p>	<p>Difficulty seeing refers to blurred vision, difficulties reading or seeing objects at a distance.</p>
<p>4. Does the child appear to have difficulty hearing?</p>	<p>Difficulty hearing refers to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Straining to hear spoken words Trouble hearing in noisy places Asking people to repeat themselves often
<p>5. Does the child struggle to speak?</p>	<p>Can he/she make himself/herself understood in words? Can he/she say any recognizable words?</p>

<p>6. Is the child's speech in any way different from normal (i.e. not clear enough to be understood by people other than his/her immediate family)?</p>	<p>Does the child communicate in sign language or in other no speech forms to make themselves understood? (Please record this into the notes)</p> <p>Can he/she name at least one object (e.g., an animal, a toy, a cup, a spoon)?</p>
<p>7. Compared to other children, does the child have any serious delay in sitting, standing, or walking?</p>	<p>Did your child meet the developmental milestones? For example, did they sit at 6 months, stand at 12 months? 'Serious' refers to a delay in meeting the milestone of more than 6 months</p>
<p>8. Does the child have difficulty in walking or moving his/her arms, or does he/she have weakness and/or stiffness in the arms or legs?</p>	<p>Difficulty refers to strained walking, pain when walking Clarify whether this is temporary or permanent Identify recurring problems e.g. where a shoulder routinely dislocates</p>
<p>9. Does the child struggle to learn to do things like other children his/her age?</p>	<p>Does the child struggle to focus and therefore finds it difficult to learn new things? Are there any conditions that causes the child not to learn effectively? Has the child ever been held back a grade at school because of inability to learn, if Yes – what grade or how long ago did this occur?</p>
<p>10. Is there any other relevant condition or challenge that the child has that may present difficulty in participating in basic swimming training?</p>	<p>Encourage the parent to provide any information you should be aware of</p>

Medical Professional Advice Form

If advice from a medical professional is sought, it is important that this advice is recorded. The template below may be used to both inform the medical professional of the nature of the programme and record the advice of the medical professional. The person parent / guardian who completed the Informed Consent form should be given a copy of the form and health screening questions to take to the medical professional along with this form.

Medical Professional Advice Form

(Insert Organisation Address and Contact Detail here)

To whom it may concern:

Drowning is one of the leading causes of child death globally. The Basic Swimming and Water Safety Skills programme is aimed at providing swimming skills (the skills include breathing, orientation, floating and moving through water) to allow persons to self-rescue, and promote safer water usage. As part of organizing swimming lessons, our organization has conducted basic health screening.

We have attached the Health Screening Form for (insert name of participant) here. As this person answered 'yes' to one of the health screening questions, we require that a medical opinion is sought as to whether or not they are fit to take part in swimming lessons. We would be grateful if you could complete the form below. If you require any further information on the basic swimming and water safety programme in order to give your opinion, please contact us using the details above.

Kind regards,

(Name of Organiser)
(Organisation)

To be completed by medical professional:

Please complete the following statement:

"I consider that _____ (insert name of participant) is fit / not fit (delete as appropriate) to take part in the basicswimming and water safety programme."

Please add any additional notes or special considerations that the training team should be aware of here:

Name of medical professional: _____

Signature:

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

Date: _____

Glossary

Caregiver	A person able to make medical or educational decisions for a child without consulting the parents first. Parents still have the right to make decisions for the child.
Consent Form	A form that is used to record consent.
Guardian	A person with full responsibility to make all decisions on behalf of a child. Only the guardian and not the parents can make decisions for the child.
Health Screening	A process to determine whether a person potentially has any health conditions that could affect their ability to safely participate in an activity.
Informed Consent	Informed consent is when a person fully understands what they are agreeing to, including associated risks.
Instructors	Swimming Teachers or similar that have been trained to deliver the basic swimming and water safety programme.
Lifeguard	A person qualified with a recognised water rescue qualification.
Parent	A mother or father of a child.
Participants	All of those present and participating in the delivery of basic swimming and water safety lessons including Instructors, students, lifeguards and any additional support staff, assistants or managers.
Risk	The likelihood and severity of something causing harm.
Students	The persons taking part in the basic swimming and water safety programme.

