

Yippee! Pool Party!



Your dog may take these words as an invitation to jump into the middle of kids playing “Marco Polo” or as her time to scout for crumbs under deck chairs.

Either way, some important water safety tips are in order because some dogs don’t like to swim and others shouldn’t.

Water Safety Example #1: One day Buddy, a Basset Hound, saw his English Setter friend, Spencer, on the far side of the pond. With a mighty leap, Buddy took off swimming toward the other bank. Buddy’s heavy body and stubby legs were not seaworthy.

Had Buddy not turned himself around, it could have become an emergency. Dogs will panic in the water and try to climb on top of a rescuer, so it is safer to throw them something that floats, like a life preserver on a rope, they can “grab.”

Water Safety Example #2: A nine-week-old Miniature Poodle barked frantically as her owners left in a rubber raft. She was unhappy to have been left on the shore. She jumped into the lake and headed for the raft. Her frightened owners turned the raft around and luckily the puppy followed them to land. She survived the incident better than her frantic owners.

The puppy incident could have been avoided if the pup had been taught to “Stay,” had been placed within an Ex-pen for its safety, or had simply been taken on the raft with a life jacket. Never assume your dog will not try to follow you into water.

Some Water Safety Training Tips to Keep in Mind:

Although not all dogs are fond of water, they should be exposed to it for their own safety. With some simple training and safety devices, you can ease your mind and protect your dog this summer.

- Give him a gradual introduction into the pool or lake by holding him snugly and slowly walking into the water. Let him get wet a little at a time and eventually let him swim to the exit. Make it a positive experience with lots of encouragement and praise.
- Teach proper swimming technique. All dogs will instinctively paddle when submerged in water, but as inexperienced swimmers, many dogs try to rely on their front legs and do little with their rear legs. This results in an almost vertical swim technique with lots of splashing. It’s exhausting and very easy for a dog to become over-tired this way. With proper training, the most vertical of swimmers can learn to use their rear legs, evening out their performance and swimming much more effectively and safely. Keep a close eye on your dog – if you see them become over-stimulated or fatigued, it’s time to call them out. If you see your accomplished swimmer dog lowering his rear, this is a sign that he is getting tired.
- Dogs have poor depth perception so if the pool has steps, mark them with a big potted plant and make sure he associates the plant as the exit marker. If there are no steps, provide a non-slip ramp for getting out. Spend sufficient time training him to go up the ramp if he’s alone.
- If your dog plays in a lake, make sure to stand at the place on the shore where he can easily walk out.
- Always use a life jacket on your dog in ponds, lakes, rivers, or the open water. Just like with people, it’s easy for a dog to develop a cramp in a leg, become exhausted too far from shore, or in the case of rivers or oceans, overwhelmed by tides. Life jackets give your dog the extra protection to stay buoyant.

- Keep safety floatation devices nearby, just in the case of an emergency. If your dog gets into trouble, a life preserver attached to a long line is the best course of action to take. Dogs panic easily in the water when trouble hits, and a panicked, flailing dog can accidentally drown any person trying to assist it. Get the dog to grab out to the preserver first and try to reel it in closer to shore before physically trying to help it out.
- Training polite pool manners is a must. A big Golden Retriever sailing through the air in her excitement to get in the water is a no-no. Train the canine to “Wait” at pool’s edge or to always use the steps or the ramp.
- Also teach her that the “Come” command applies to the pool as much as it does to dry land.
- Be mindful of the specific needs of your dog’s breed. Each dog’s physical structure and body-type will greatly impact his swimming ability. Heavily muscled bully breeds exert more energy while swimming due to their increased body mass. Consider using a lifejacket with such dogs for added protection.
- Watch your dog’s nails! Dogs can quickly wear their nails down to the point of bleeding as they excitedly race around the pool’s exterior. Keep a watchful eye on the pads of their feet as well. Repeated launching from pool steps can tear up paw pads; especially for dogs who spend most of their time on grass.
- Unless your pool cover is solid and strong enough to support your weight, do not leave it on when your dog is unattended near the pool. Countless dogs, even accomplished swimmers, have lost their lives following an unexpected tumble into a covered pool. Once they’re in, the cover is disorienting and it’s almost always impossible for a dog to find his way out. If your dog needs to spend time in the yard unsupervised, consider erecting a pool safety fence.
- Avoid letting your dog drink pool water. Always keep an ample supply of fresh water around so your dog can drink without attempting to drink from the pool. Also make sure you give your dog many opportunities to relieve himself after a swim as he is likely to ingest water from wherever he is swimming (pool, pond, lake or ocean) and may need to urinate more often.
- Make sure you rinse your dog off after a swim to get chlorine and other pool chemicals, as well as bacteria or dirt he might get on him from a pond or lake. Don’t let your dog sit in a wet collar as hot spots can develop. Be mindful of areas where water can collect, like ears, groin, and armpits, where moisture-induced infections can occur.
- If your dog is overweight or a senior, check with your veterinarian first before allowing him to swim. This is also important for dogs who are generally sedentary. Dogs, like people, experience muscle soreness and stiffness and they’re counting on us to lookout for their best interests.

For additional information on water safety and activities with your dog:

- Get Pets Wet! - safety products for dogs at www.getpetswet.com
- Pool Safety Fences at www.poolsafetyfences.com
- Doggy Docks at www.doggydocks.com
- Paws Aboard at www.pawsaboard.com
- Boat Dock Pool Ramps at www.petclassics.com/Boat-Dock-Pool-Ramps/
- Alarm System – notifies if animal falls into pool at www.safetyturtle.com/pool-safety-products/pet-pool-safety.html
- Information on near - drowning in dogs at www.petplace.com/dogs/near-drowning-in-dogs/page1.aspx

For more information on the Association of Pet Dog Trainers,
visit our Web site at www.apdt.com or call 1-800-PET-DOGS (738-3647) or email information@apdt.com.