

# COASTAL TIPS

## Top tips on safe intertidal and snorkelling work with kids!

This guide offers advice for safe working on the beach and in the shallows. It is not an extensive risk assessment. Project Seagrass is not responsible for risk management or an injury incurred to participants or leaders during an activity. Risk assessments and precautions are your responsibility.

Whilst at the seaside, please only take photos and only leave footprints (or bubbles!).



### General:



- Always take an appropriate first aid kit and a trained first aider into the field.
- Have an emergency action plan, including a hospital evacuation strategy.
- Know where the nearest point of phone signal or landline is. Using a VHF radio or a walkie-talkie may be considered at sites with poor phone signals. Brief everyone on a clear recall signal in case you need to clear the beach quickly. For example, three short whistle blows.
- Consider what facilities are at the site such as toilets and cafés.



If you find yourself in an emergency or spot someone else in trouble, you should call **999** or **112** and ask for the coastguard!



## Weather:

- Always check the weather forecast before fieldwork and do not go if you are unsure about the conditions.
- Remember that the weather can change quickly on the coast, keep an eye on it and prepare for all conditions.
- The sun reflects off the sea, making it easy to burn even if it is not a hot day. Always wear reef safe sunblock, a hat, and sunglasses.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Pack lots of warm and wet weather gear. Keeping your head warm is key especially after a cold dip in the sea! Waterproofs are good for keeping the wind off as well as the rain. If anyone is cold, try to get them moving and have a hot drink. Move them to a warmer spot sheltered from the wind, such as the minibus, whilst the rest of the group finishes up.
- Ensure a survival blanket is in the first aid kit.



## Tides:

- Check the tide times before fieldwork.
- Research whether there is anything unusual about the site, such as rip currents or strong tides. Follow the local safety guidelines and advice.
- Most intertidal and snorkelling work is best done on a spring low tide (full moon).
- Keep an eye on the tide so that no one gets cut off from land as it comes back in.



## Marine life:

- Do not disturb or touch marine life! If you leave it be, it will not harm you!
- Some animals can bite, sting or pinch. Seek appropriate medical attention if needed.
- Wear shoes or wetsuit booties and avoid standing on marine life. Find out whether there are any species to be wary of and what to do if an incident occurs. For example, weever fish bury themselves in the sand with venomous spines sticking out, standing on them without booties is extremely painful! If this occurs, soak the wound in hot water for at least 30 minutes and then leave the puncture wound open to allow it to drain.
- Shuffling through the water rather than stepping can alert animals to your presence, allowing them time to get out of your way.
- Do not pick or damage plants.



## Rock pooling and beach work:

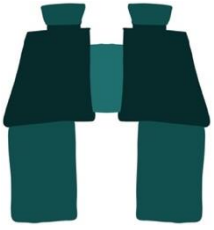
- Rockpools can be slippery and sharp environments. Move slowly so as not to fall and cut yourself.
- Seaweed and seagrass can be really slippery!
- Watch out for hidden rocks, ropes or snags.
- Keep an eye on the tide so that no one gets cut off from land as it comes back in.
- Watch out for any sharp objects in the sand.
- Be mindful of rock fall if standing near cliffs, and do not climb them as sediment may be unstable.
- Do not hammer or dislodge the rock face unless asked to do so. If hammering is required, ensure safety goggles are worn and students work away from each other to avoid injury.
- Avoid recent landslide and rockfall sites, especially after heavy rain and storms.

- Stay to defined footpaths and away from cliff edges.
- Wear closed-toe shoes.



- Consider the weather and tides! You need calm, relatively flat conditions for snorkelling.
- After heavy rain or storms, the water might be murky, making it challenging to see anything. Try and plan around the weather!
- Aim to be in the water for the slack water. Slack water lasts 30-60 minutes before and after low tide. At this time, there is the least water movement, reducing physical effort, the need to duck dive, and the best visibility.
- Whilst snorkelling, designate someone to stay on land. The land person keeps track of who is in the water and watches that no one is moving towards a potentially dangerous situation. They should be first aid trained and have a phone ready to call for help in the case of an emergency. It is useful to record the times of each buddy pair going in and coming out of the water.
- Before getting in brief the group on communication signals. Touching your head calmly above the water is an ok sign- this is a question and should be answered by doing the signal in return to say ok! If something isn't ok, then wave lots. Remind the kids not to wave their arms around if they are fine as you might think they are drowning! A whistle may be useful to get people's attention.
- Set area boundaries before entering the water.
- Get the kids to snorkel in buddy pairs, reminding them they are responsible for their buddies' safety. Group 2 to 4 buddy pairs per staff member, or as appropriate by the group's competency levels. Set a maximum distance that the buddy pairs can go from their staff member.

- You may consider a surface marker buoy (SMB) per buddy pair or group. This makes it much easier to spot where the snorkellers are, especially if they are duck diving. Be wary that unconfident swimmers might find holding on to the SMB challenging and can get tangled in the string. Bright swimming caps/ hoods may offer an easier alternative.
- Always get out of the water as soon as you feel tired, cold or are shivering.
- Attach the snorkel to the side of the mask to stop it from falling off.
- Remind kids to try not to breathe through their nose as the mask will fog. If it becomes foggy, then give it a swill in the sea. A small blob of baby shampoo wiped around the inside of the mask and then rinsed out will help to stop the mask from fogging up.
- Practice breathing through the snorkel above the water, and then try with their mouths under but eyes still out. Finally, try breathing through it with their face fully submerged.
- Remind new snorkellers that if they put their head too deep or there is a big wave, their snorkel might fill with water. If this happens, they just need to do a big blast of breath out to clear it, or they can let it drain above the water.
- Fins are optional. If using, put fins on once in the water.
- A surf or paddle board can be used as a floatation device to hold on to whilst gaining confidence.
- Watch out for other water users, such as boats and jet skis. Try to avoid areas that they are using. Ensure you are visible to them - using an SMB helps if possible.
- Move slowly whilst in the sea - there may be hidden rocks or ropes to trip you!
- Free dive only in areas of clear water, with no risk of entanglement whilst underwater.
- Plenty of water and eating ginger-based products can reduce the effects of sea sickness.



## Wildlife spotting tips!

- Move slowly and be still and an animal is more likely to show itself to you.
- Look for shapes rather than colours.
- The strandline is a great place to search, this is the line of seaweed and other bits left behind as the tide heads back down the beach.
- The more you have your feet on the floor whilst snorkelling, the more you will scare the animals and make the water murky.
- Check on the sea floor, between seagrass, seaweed and rocks, and straight out to sea.
- Look closely at leaves and rocks for tiny critters.
- Patience and constant scanning are key!