Summer Water Safety for Dogs and Puppies

Some of our fondest memories and photos with our Guiding Eyes Puppies are taken at pools, lakes or the ocean. Puppies require the same safety precautions you would use for a toddler or young child. Water is a lot of fun to be around as long as we follow some simple safety precautions.

First and foremost:

- Our Guiding Eyes Veterinarians strongly advise that puppies under eight months of age be prohibited from kayaking or swimming in deep water.
- Anytime that a dog or puppy is near a body of water, even if on lead or in an enclosed area, he or she must be constantly supervised.

Water Dangers for Dogs and Puppies

- Accidental hanging or drowning
  - Dogs might jump out of a boat, or off a dock or platform because they don't realize that it is water that they are jumping into and not solid ground.
  - Many puppies younger than 12 months of age don't have the cognition or even the strength to hold their heads above the surface of the water for an extended period of time.
  - A puppy with the strength to hold its head above the surface could get water in its ears and react by turning its head sideways and downward as its legs continue paddling. This can propel him or her to the bottom.
  - Puppies do swim “doggie paddle” and hold their breath underwater, however:
    - Many will swim straight down
    - Some might swim in a circle underwater until they run out of air and aspirate water.
- Powerful waves along shorelines can wash footing out from under young puppies and strong currents can pull them out into the open water.
- Washed up beach debris such as boards with nails in them, barbed fish hooks or broken glass may cause injury to the pads of the feet if walked upon, or to the mouth if picked up or ingested.
- Wave action between boats and the dock can crush your dog.
- Docks with space between boards can catch and injure a puppy's toes.

What to Watch for When a Dog is in the Water

- Distress
- Overexertion
- If on lead, watch to make sure the lead does not get snagged or tangled on such things as weeds, docks, underwater obstructions, rafts, toys, people or other dogs
What to Do

- It's important to stay connected to your puppy.
- Entering and exiting floating docks and rocking boats can be challenging for both raiser and puppy; accept a helping hand when available.
- Remember that puppies, like people, can drown in water as shallow as one to two inches.
- When taking a dog for a kayak or canoe ride, remember that they can be somewhat unstable, so:
  - Keep a low center of gravity
  - Stay close to shore
  - Have appropriate personal flotation device on or with you
  - Limit the duration of your ride.
- If you capsize with a dog or puppy onboard a boat or kayak:
  - Keep in mind that it is impossible to empty the water out of a kayak.
  - Stay together as you make your way to shore with your dog and boat.
  - If you have your personal flotation device on it will protect you from being clawed and help you float and stay relaxed-
    - Some dogs will see you as their security and, in a panic, try to climb you to keep their head above water.
  - Since older, stronger dogs may try to break away and head for shore remember to stay together.
- Use a lead when swimming. A five-foot length will keep you close enough for safety.
- When walking the beach with a dog or puppy, remember:
  - Avoid dead animals, like fish or birds, that often lie decaying along waterfronts and shorelines

- While boating, please keep in mind:
  - Lifejackets for dogs are a good idea
  - The bright color of the jacket makes it easier to locate in the case of an emergency
- Remember that just because they are dogs does not mean they understand water and can swim.

What NOT to Do

- Never tie or tether a dog or puppy to a boat or a dock
- Do not allow dogs to swim between boats and the dock.
- Never use a lifejacket as a substitute for good supervision.
  - Lifejackets do NOT hold a puppy's head up and they may cause a puppy to work harder to swim
  - Wearing a lifejacket can make the dog or puppy uncomfortably hot when out of the water.
- Never leave your dog or puppy unattended near the water.

Our thanks to Sandra Yaskow, American Red Cross Lifeguard and Water Safety Instructor, for contributing these tips on water safety for dogs and puppies. Sandra began teaching swimming in 1972. She became a Red Cross Certified Life Guard and Water Safety Instructor at pools and on the shores of Lake Ontario. Sandra became a part of Guiding Eyes for the Blind in 1998 as a puppy-raiser.