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## Safety First!

Ethics are a close second. Fishing can be relaxing and sociable, a quiet personal escape, or an exciting group adventure. Regardless of your goals for your fishing trip, safety and outdoor ethics should always be a consideration when you pack your gear.



### Gearing Up

Think about the environment you will be in while you are fishing. What are three dangers you might face?

1) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_

Think about the types of gear that you could bring that would help you to avoid these dangers or allow you to address them if they happen. Make a list below.

1) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_

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## SOS

Drowning kills nearly 3,000 Americans of all ages every year. It is the second leading cause of accidental death for people ages five to 44. Even great swimmers can drown when something unexpected happens—like a boat overturning in cold water. If you need to assist a struggling swimmer, follow these steps:

**REACH:** Extend a branch, paddle, fishing pole or other item towards the person to pull him or her to safety.

**THROW:** If the person cannot be reached, throw him or her a buoy, a PFD, or another floating item attached to a rope and pull the person in.

**ROW:** Use a rescue boat to go to the person. Help him or her get into the boat or hold on.

**NEVER** swim out to the person unless you are trained in lifesaving methods.

### Before You Go

When getting ready to take a fishing trip, it is always a good idea to check the weather. High winds, hot temperatures, or cold rain could all change the location you choose to fish and the gear that you will take. You might have to postpone your trip until another day. No matter when and where you end up going, you should always tell someone where you are planning to fish and when you will return. Even if you are just walking down the road to the local creek with a friend, tell a family member or leave a note. It is always better to be safe than sorry.

### At the Waterfront

If you're going to be fishing from shore or wading in the water, it's a good idea to take a look around before you start fishing. Check with a walking stick to see how stable the banks are, how even or uneven the stream bottom or lakebed is, and whether there are any hazards on the bank or in the water. If you are going to be in the water, wear a **lifejacket personal flotation device** (PFD)—especially if you plan to wear waders. If you fall, waders can

fill with water and make it hard for you to swim. If you are staying on shore, a PFD is still a good idea. You never know when it could come in handy.

If you are going fishing in a boat, be careful not to overload it. Weather can change quickly on the water. A boat that seemed appropriately loaded in calm water may not be suitable for waves. Pack as if the weather were going to get bad, even if storms are not in the forecast. Make sure that there is a PFD for every person onboard the boat (it's the law), and set an example by wearing yours. If you are under 16, you **MUST** have either an adult onboard with you or a boating certificate.

### Back at Home

When you return from a fishing trip, always take a moment to think through any near-misses you may have had or any actions others were taking that seemed unsafe. What could be done differently to avoid the danger? Anglers can always learn from themselves and from the actions of others, no matter how experienced they are.



## An Ethical Note

Anglers are always faced with choices. Which bait? Where to fish? When to quit for the day? Sometimes, choices made are based on fishing regulations while others are guided by a set of personal ethics, or what you do when no one is watching. Public perception and support of angling depends a lot on the behavior of anglers. When stream banks and shorelines are littered with worm containers and fishing line, an accusing finger is pointed at all anglers. To help cultivate or maintain the image of anglers as conservationists, we have to clean up after a few thoughtless individuals and set a good example for novices.

As a group, brainstorm a list of ethical and unethical fishing behaviors. In small teams, use the list to role-play different scenarios in skits. Some examples are listed below to get you started; there can be more than one choice for each situation. Consider landowner-angler interactions and note any legal or ethical violations as well as positive behaviors. When the skits are over, discuss your observations.

1. You come upon an angler fishing a pool in a nice stretch of stream. You:
  - a. backtrack around the angler and find a different spot a respectable distance away.
  - b. wade in to claim a good spot for yourself.
  - c. wait for the angler to finish.
2. You've been wading a stream and decide it's time for lunch. You:
  - a. clamber up the bank near a private home for a picnic. (trespassing)
  - b. find a big, comfortable log hanging over the water to take a rest.
  - c. hop up on the nearest pier. (trespassing)
3. You and a friend have been fishing for a time near clusters of other anglers and it's time to quit for the day. You
  - a. crank up some music.
  - b. reel in and go for a quiet dip.
  - c. look around for old fishing line or other trash you may have dropped.
4. As you and your friend are fishing, a pair of loons swims within 100 feet of you. Your friend starts throwing rocks at the birds. You

- a. start practicing your loon call.
  - b. remind your friend that there are laws against harassing wildlife.
  - c. try to prove that you're a better aim.
5. You're hungry for fish and decide that you're going to keep a couple to eat if luck is with you today. You catch a legal-sized fish and put it on the stringer. A few casts later, you catch an even bigger one of the same species. Keeping it would put you over the daily bag limit. You:
    - a. release it immediately.
    - b. give away the smaller one and keep the big one. (illegal)
    - c. switch it for the one on your stringer. (illegal)

Here are some questions to ask when confronted with a decision:

- Is it legal?
- Would it be good if everybody did it?
- Would you want to be on the receiving end of the action?
- Would it make you proud?

Here are a few simple guidelines to help you fulfill your **ethical** responsibility to the outdoors:

- Leave the environment as you found it. Pack out anything you brought with you on your fishing trip and take it home with you. Do not leave trash or discarded fishing line behind.
- Be courteous to others in the outdoors. Avoid crowding other anglers and keep your voice down! Sound carries very well over water, so speak softly.
- Take advantage of opportunities to help improve our out-of-doors. Community groups occasionally have clean up or maintenance trips to improve the quality of our public lands and waters.
- Be aware of public-private boundaries and ask private landowners for access to the water before venturing onto their land. Check the DNR Website to learn about your water rights as an angler, through the Public Trust Doctrine under the state constitution, [dnr.wi.gov/org/water/wm/dsfm/shore/doctrine](http://dnr.wi.gov/org/water/wm/dsfm/shore/doctrine).