

Risk Assessment – Family Kayaking (St Denys to Weston Shore)

Activity: Family Kayaking – St Denys to Weston Shore and return

Location: River Itchen / Weston Shore (Southampton)

Activity Type: Supervised Family Paddle (sheltered water; children present)

Date last reviewed: 23 January 2026

Assessor: James Wardle

Reviewed by:

Review due: January 2027

Scope and Context

This risk assessment covers a supervised family kayaking trip from St Denys Boat Club to Weston Shore and return.

This route is more sheltered and simpler than exposed coastal journeys such as Lepe to Calshot, however it introduces additional considerations due to the presence of children (with parents/guardians) and the need for clear group control.

The trip should be planned around high tide to reduce mud/grounding risk and to improve launch/landing options at Weston Shore.

Additional Controls (Activity Specific)

- High tide planning: schedule arrival and departure at Weston Shore close to high water to reduce mud, shallow water and difficult exits.
- Family safeguarding: children must be accompanied by a parent/guardian and remain under their supervision at all times (on and off the water).
- Boat suitability: children only in stable craft appropriate to their size and confidence; consider tandem boats with an experienced adult in control.
- Group management: nominated Lead and Sweep; keep group compact; regular headcounts; no-one passes the Lead or drops behind the Sweep.
- Buddy system: families paired; if one family stops, their buddy group stops too.
- Clothing for immersion: dress for water temperature; carry spare warm layer for children; stop early if anyone becomes cold or tired.
- Easy escape plan: identify simple exit points and a fixed 'turn back' time; do not extend distance beyond the planned route.

- Public interface at Weston Shore: manage landings away from swimmers/ launching boats where possible; slow controlled approach.

Risk Assessment Table

Hazard	Who Might Be Harmed	Risk	Control Measures	Risk Level	Further Actions
Immersion / cold exposure	Children and adults	Cold shock, hypothermia, panic	Buoyancy aids mandatory. Clothing suitable for immersion. Conservative conditions. Spare warm layer for children. Stop early if cold/fatigued.	Medium	Shorten trip in cold weather
Tide and shallow water at Weston Shore	All participants	Grounding, stuck in mud, delayed return	Plan around high tide. Avoid landing in soft mud. Choose suitable landing area and approach slowly.	Low–Medium	Adjust timing if tide differs
Separation / group splitting	All participants	Delayed assistance; increased risk to children	Lead/Sweep system; compact group; buddy families; regular headcounts; clear rules on stopping and overtaking.	Low–Medium	Split into smaller pods if large group
Collision with other river users	Participants and other users	Injury / capsize	Keep to agreed side; maintain lookout; slow down near traffic; regroup to allow others to pass.	Low–Medium	Avoid peak rowing times where possible
Launching/landing slips/trips	All	Sprains, cuts	Controlled launch/landing; assistance for children; keep area clear; suitable footwear; avoid steep/slippery banks.	Low	Use alternative access point if needed
Fatigue (children/novices)	Children/novices	Reduced judgement; capsize	Short route; regular breaks; snacks/hydration; turn back early; encourage honest reporting of tiredness.	Low–Medium	Set conservative turnaround time
Excitement / unsafe behaviour	Children and group	Capsize; separation; injury	Clear briefing for children/parents: stay seated, listen to instructions, no racing ahead, stop on command.	Low	Remind at each regroup point

General Notes

- Leads/skippers are responsible for dynamic risk assessment and may modify or stop the activity if conditions become unsuitable.
- Parents/guardians remain responsible for their children at all times.
- Participants must follow instructions and communicate concerns promptly.
- This risk assessment should be reviewed annually or following any incident or near miss.