



PRESS RELEASE – WATER SAFETY IRELAND

13 June 2021

Ministers Humphreys and O’Gorman launch “Hold Hands” - A programme to help young children stay safe from drowning

For all children, it has been a year with swimming pools closed and without swimming lessons. With summer weather on the way, it is more important than ever that we encourage all children to think and talk about water safety.

Water Safety Ireland has launched a water safety resource to over 4,000 Early Learning and Care Centres nationwide. Educators will use the resources to give children the knowledge needed to stay safe from drowning. The ‘Hold Hands’ programme, launched by Ministers Heather Humphreys and Roderic O’Gorman has been built around one very simple insight. **That a young child should always hold an adult’s hand near water.**

Both Ministers were joined by Amanda Cambridge, whose young son Avery Greene, tragically drowned on a family holiday in 2019.

“Our world was turned upside down on the 12th of August 2019, while on holidays in Spain. Our blonde, blue eyed boy, Avery, lost his life in a swimming pool accident. He was 3 years old. That’s why I’m an advocate for early learning water safety in pre-schools, creches and all Early Learning Centres. I believe Water Safety Ireland’s ‘Hold Hands’ programme has the potential to be both lifesaving and life changing.” Amanda Cambridge

The ‘Hold Hands’ resources have been designed by WSI to highlight potential water safety dangers at home, on farms, on the beach, at rivers, lakes and on holiday. Storyboards grab children’s imagination and include a cleverly designed pointer, shaped like a hand, so whenever a child engages in water safety learning, they are physically holding a hand to reinforce the behavioural change the lessons are trying to instil.

“It is never too early to start learning how to be safe around water”, commented Heather Humphreys, Minister for Rural and Community Development. **“It complements Water Safety Ireland’s education resources for primary schools and is part of a wider effort to foster a healthy respect for water safety as children grow. This ‘whole of life’ approach to water safety has the potential to change the attitudes and behaviours of children around water and save so many lives in the process.”**



“Children are born learning. That’s what is so exciting about this initiative”, commented Roderic O’Gorman, Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, “By instilling simple water safety lessons in our youngest children at this formative stage, we’re building an awareness that will stay with them for life.”

Speaking about the launch, Water Safety Ireland Chairman Martin O’Sullivan commented... *“National Water Safety Awareness Week begins on Monday 14th June. This year, we are asking everyone to give water safety the focus we all continue to give COVID. In the last year we have proven how much we can come together as a country for the good of all. We average ten drownings in Ireland every month but imagine how many drownings could be prevented if we can make water safety part of our everyday conversation with children, friends and family. I extend my thanks to the volunteers at Water Safety Ireland, to both Government Departments, to Early Childhood Ireland and to Seas Suas for their assistance with various aspects of the initiative.”*

View Resources here: <https://watersafety.ie/hold-hands>

ENDS

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