

What to Do When Things Go Wrong

A scenario-based guide for common challenges on the beach

Why This Matters

Every Age Manager will face moments where a session does not go to plan. What matters most is not avoiding every issue - it is responding calmly, safely and consistently when something happens.

When things go wrong, children take their cues from the adults around them. A calm response protects safety, reassures families and helps your team stay focused.

Your First Priorities

When something unexpected happens, return to the same sequence:

- **Keep people safe.**
- **Pause the activity if needed.**
- **Get the right support early.**
- **Communicate clearly.**
- **Record or report the issue in line with club processes.**

Scenario 1: A Child is Injured

If a child is hurt, stop the activity and assess the situation. Do not continue the session around them as if nothing happened.

Call in the appropriate first aid support and follow your club process. Stay calm, keep the child reassured and make sure the rest of the group is supervised away from the incident.

If the injury is minor, the child may be able to return once properly assessed and supported. If not, adjust the session and communicate clearly with the parent or guardian.

Practical Response

Use this sequence:

- **Stop the activity.**
- **Check the immediate risk.**
- **Call First aid or escalate as required.**
- **Keep the group supervised and settled.**
- **Advise the parent or guardian.**
- **Follow club reporting requirements.**

Scenario 2: Water Activities Are Closed

Sometimes the water is not available due to surf, lightning, water quality, unsafe conditions or a broader operational decision. When this happens, shift quickly rather than apologising for the whole session.

Children do not need water every week to have a valuable Nippers experience. There are many ways to teach surf awareness, teamwork, fitness and lifesaving concepts on land.

Practical Alternatives

If water is closed, you might switch to:

- **Beach safety games.**
- **Relay activities on sand.**
- **Signals and communication drills.**
- **Board handling on land.**
- **Scenario-based learning.**
- **Team challenges or rotations.**

Scenario 3: An Angry Or Upset Parent

Occasionally a parent may approach you while emotions are running high. This may be about activity choices, supervision, fairness, a child being upset or something they believe was handled poorly.

Listen without becoming defensive. Keep your voice calm and avoid trying to solve everything in front of children or in the middle of the session. Where possible, move the conversation aside and involve the relevant supervisor, JAC member or club leader if needed.

Your role is to respond respectfully, not to argue.

Helpful Approach

Try to:

- **Listen first.**
- **Acknowledge the concern.**
- **Explain briefly and calmly.**
- **Avoid public conflict.**
- **Escalate through the right club process if needed.**

Scenario 4: A Child Refuses to Participate

Not all non-participation is defiance. A child may be anxious, tired, embarrassed, overwhelmed or simply unsure.

Start by reducing the pressure. Offer a smaller role, a chance to watch first, a buddy, or a modified version of the task. Some children will join once they understand the activity and feel safe enough to try.

Do not shame a child for not participating. The goal is to build trust and confidence, not win a power struggle.

Helpful Options

When a child will not join in, you can:

- **Ask quietly what is worrying them.**
- **Let them watch the first round.**
- **Pair them with a friend.**
- **Give them a helper role.**
- **Offer a simpler version of the activity.**
- **Check in again later rather than forcing it immediately.**

When To Escalate

Some issues need immediate support beyond the Age Manager. Escalate early if there is a serious injury, a safety threat, significant behavioural risk, a child protection concern, an ongoing parent conflict, or any issue you are not confident managing on your own.

Getting support early is a sign of good judgement, not failure.

After The Incident

Once the immediate issue is managed, take a moment with your team. Ask what happened, what worked and what should happen next time.

Even a short debrief helps improve future responses and keeps everyone learning together.

Final Thought

Things will go wrong from time to time. Good Age Managers are not the ones who never face problems - they are the ones who respond with calm, care and common sense when those moments arrive.

