

Children should be encouraged to enjoy 'wild' swimming: education expert

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Keeping young children away from perceived risky activities such as wild outdoor swimming is damaging, according to education expert Dr Sandra Leaton Gray (UCL Institute of Education).

Writing in her book 'Invisibly Blighted: the digital erosion of childhood' Leaton Gray says, "Heavily supervised [young children](#) of today may simply be more likely to drown as youths because they don't go swimming very often and their water safety awareness is low, compared to that of children who swim frequently under less supervision."

There were 17 deaths by drowning of [young people](#) aged 10 to 19 in outside waters (including lakes, ponds and rivers) in England in 2015.

Speaking to The Sunday Times, Leaton Gray said young [people](#) were being deterred from dipping into waters that were safe by unnecessary "no swimming" signs. "We are banning swimming in more and more places, and by doing so, making it more dangerous for the very young people we are trying to protect.

"Swimming has become an approved activity run by [local authorities](#) in special places, which are almost always heavily chlorinated [swimming pools](#), with strict session times."

Leaton Gray said supervised swimming in rivers and lakes would help reduce the risk and the numbers of lives lost.

"Young people gather in all sorts of dodgy spots that wild swimmers would never venture into and then start taking serious risks without being properly aware of the consequences."

She will present her paper, 'How risky is it to be a child?' at the British Educational Research Association (BERA) conference this week.

Provided by University College London

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