Water Safety

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PEDIATRIC CARE • SUPPORTING • PARENTING
A Program of ZERO TO THREE

Drowning is the leading cause of injury-related death among children ages 1-4. Almost 1,000 children die by drowning every year. Drowning can happen at any time and in any family. As scary as it is to imagine, it's important to know the facts about drowning so you can help keep your children safe.

FACT: DROWNING IS SILENT. CHILDREN CAN DROWN IN SECONDS, WITH BARELY A SPLASH.

Caregiver Tips:

- Assign an adult to be the Water Watcher. It's like a designated driver at the pool or beach. The Water Watcher's job is to watch all children swimming or playing in or NEAR water.
- This person needs to:
  - ✓ Not be under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
  - ✓ Put away their cell phone.
  - ✓ Avoid other activities.
  - ✓ Watch closely, even if there are lifeguards.
  - ✓ Switch off with another adult for breaks.
- Use a swimming pool alarm. They tell you if there are waves on the water's surface. Then you know if anyone has fallen into the pool.

FACT: CHILDREN CAN DROWN IN AS LITTLE AS 2 INCHES OF WATER.

Caregiver Tips:

- Empty water from buckets and other containers right after use.

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- Use toilet locks and do not leave your young child alone in the bathroom.
- Keep your eyes on your young child in the bathtub.
- Avoid infant seats or bath chairs in the bathtub. They do not protect children from drowning (see Bath Time article).

FACT: 27 PERCENT OF DROWNINGS (AMONG CHILDREN AGE 4 AND UNDER) TOOK PLACE AT THE HOME OF A FRIEND, RELATIVE, OR NEIGHBOR. Even if your house is safe and childproofed, you might get invited to your neighbor's house—and they have no pool fence or alarm.

Caregiver Tips:

- Always keep your child within your sight. If it's too stressful to keep constant watch while at a friend's house, you can reply with a "sorry-can't-make-it RSVP."
- Put your young child in a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket (that fits well) when around water, pools, or hot tubs.

FACT: MOST DROWNINGS OF CHILDREN UNDER 5 HAPPEN IN HOME SWIMMING POOLS. Nearly 70 percent of drowned children were not expected to be at the pool, yet they were found in the water. Forty-six percent were last seen in the house. Toddlers have ninja-level escape skills. They want what they want and will not always be stopped by a closed door.

Caregiver Tips:

- Pay close attention when young children are in and around water. Watching closely is the best way to keep them from drowning.
- Use childproof doors with locks so toddlers cannot open them.
- Put pool toys away so toddlers are not tempted by them.
- If a child can't be found, **check pools and hot tubs first**.
- Install a permanent fence around the pool. The fence should:

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- ✓ Be a minimum of four feet high and surround the pool entirely on all four sides.
- ✓ Be climb-proof with no footholds.
- ✓ Have vertical slats with no more than 4-inch gaps (so young children can't get through).
- ✓ Have a latch at least 54 inches off the ground.
- ✓ Have a self-closing, self-latching gate.
- ✓ Be locked when the pool is not in use.

FACT: SWIM LESSONS FOR CHILDREN STARTING AROUND AGE 1 MAY LOWER DROWNING RATES. However, you can't "drown-proof" a child. Always watch your child closely around water.

Caregiver Tips:

- Look for swim programs that teach children how to get out of the water if they fall in.
- When young children are in or around the water, an adult with swimming skills should always stay within an arm's length, providing constant "touch supervision."
- Don't assign older children to watch younger children near bathtubs, pools, spas, or other open water.

Adapted from resources from the American Academy of Pediatrics:
Drowning Prevention for Curious Toddlers: What Parents Need to Know and *Pool Dangers and Drowning Prevention–When It's not Swimming Time*

SCAN FOR MORE INFO

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