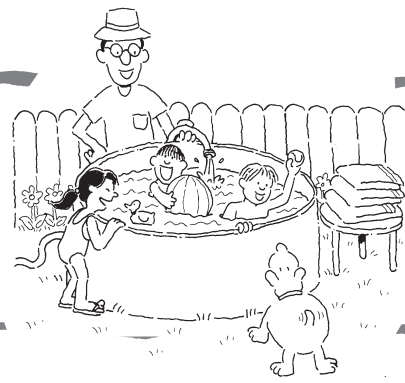


# A Parent's Guide to Water Safety



Drowning is one of the top causes of injury and death in children. Children can drown in pools, rivers, ponds, lakes, or oceans. They can even drown in a few inches of water in bathtubs, toilets, and large buckets. Read more about how to help keep your children safe around water.

## Water safety at home

Parents need to keep a close eye on infants and young children, especially as they learn to crawl. *To keep your child safe, make sure you*

- **Always stay within arm's reach of your child when she is in the bathtub.** Many bathtub drownings happen (even in a few inches of water) when a parent leaves a small child alone or with another young child. Your child is always more important than answering the telephone or taking care of household chores.
- **Empty all buckets and other large containers.** The weight of a bucket filled with liquid can be heavy, and a child may not be able to tip it over and get out if she falls in.
- **Keep bathroom doors closed.** Install doorknob covers or a hook-and-eye latch or other lock that is out of the reach of your small child.
- **Keep toilets closed.** Always close the toilet lid, and consider using a toilet lid latch.
- **Watch your child when using a bath seat or ring.** Bath seats and rings are meant to be bathing aids. They are not substitutes for adult supervision and will not keep your child from drowning.

## Water safety at the pool

An adult should actively watch children at all times while they are in a pool. Use "touch supervision." This means an adult is never more than an arm's length away, or is able to touch the child, at all times. Remember, supervision by an older child, and even the presence of a pool lifeguard, isn't a safe substitute for adult supervision.

## Pool rules

*If you have a pool, insist that the following rules are followed:*

- Keep toys away from the pool when the pool is not in use.
- Empty blow-up pools after each use.
- No tricycles or other riding toys at poolside.
- No electrical appliances near the pool.
- No diving in a pool that is not deep enough.
- No running on the pool deck.

## Pool fences

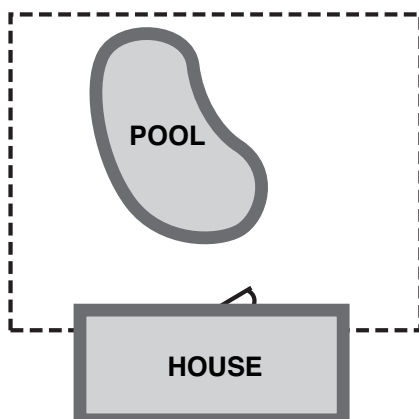
To prevent a small child from entering the pool area on his own, there should be a fence that completely surrounds the pool or spa. Combined with the watchful eyes of an adult, a fence is the best way to protect your child *and* other children who may visit or live nearby.

A pool fence should be climb-resistant and should not have anything alongside it (such as lawn furniture) that can be used to climb it.

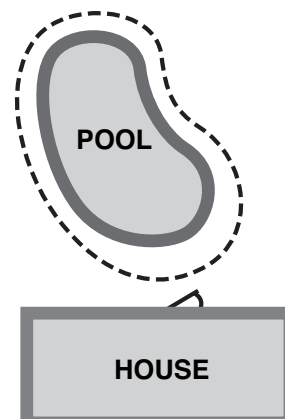
*Pool fences should also*

- Completely surround the pool, separating it from the house and the rest of the yard.
- Be at least 4 feet high and have no footholds or handholds that could help a child climb it.
- Have no more than 4 inches between vertical slats. Chain-link fences are very easy to climb and are not recommended as pool fences. If they must be used, the diamond shape should not be bigger than  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inches.
- Have a gate that is well maintained and is self-closing and self-latching. It should only open away from the pool. The latches should be higher than a child can reach.
- Keep children away from steps or ladders (for above-ground pools). If not, the steps or ladders should be locked or removed to prevent access by children.

**WRONG!**



**RIGHT!**



## In an emergency

*The following are ways to be ready for an emergency:*

- **Learn CPR.** Anyone caring for or watching children should know CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation). CPR can save a life and help reduce injury after a near drowning. The American Red Cross, the American Heart Association, and your local hospital or fire department offer CPR training.
- **Always have a phone near the pool.** Clearly post your local emergency phone number (usually 911).
- **Post safety and CPR instructions at poolside.**
- **Make sure all rescue equipment is nearby.** This includes a shepherd's hook, safety ring, and rope.

*The following are things to do in an emergency:*

- **Yell for help.** Carefully lift the child out of the water.
- **Start CPR right away.** Have someone call the emergency medical service (911).
- **Call your pediatrician.** Even if the child seems normal when revived, call your pediatrician right away.

*Additional protection products, when used with a 4-sided fence, are also important; however, these are not substitutes for adequate fencing. These may include the following:*

- Automatic pool covers (motorized covers operated by a switch). Pool covers should cover the entire pool so that a child can't slip under them. Make sure there is no standing water on top of the pool cover. Be aware that floating solar covers are *not* safety covers.
- Door alarms
- Doors to the house that are self-closing/self-latching
- Window guards
- Pool alarms

## Swimming lessons

Children are generally not developmentally ready for formal swimming lessons until after their fourth birthday. Also, swimming lessons for infants and toddlers do not necessarily make them safer in or around the water and are not a recommended means of drowning prevention at these ages.

If you want to put your small child in a swimming program, choose one that doesn't require him to put his head under water (swallowing too much water can make your child sick). Also, find a program that lets you swim with your child. Once your child is ready (generally after his fourth birthday) he should be taught how to swim. However, remember that teaching your child to swim does not mean he is safe in the water. Even a child who knows how to swim can drown a few feet from safety. Also remember that even a child who knows how to swim needs to be watched at all times. No one, adult or child, should ever swim alone.

Older children and teens are also at risk from drowning, even if they know how to swim. They often drown while swimming in unsupervised places such as water-filled quarries, rivers, or ponds. Although many teens can swim well, they often encounter risky situations that they might not recognize, such as rough currents, surf, and sharp rocks. Alcohol is also a factor in many drownings among teens.

## Diving

Serious spinal cord injuries, permanent brain damage, and death can occur to swimmers who dive into shallow water or spring upward on the diving board and hit it on the way down.

*Keep safe by following these simple common-sense diving rules.*

- Check how deep the water is. Enter the water feet first, especially when going in for the first time.
- Never dive into above-ground pools; they are usually not deep enough.
- Never dive into the shallow end of a pool.
- Never dive through inner tubes or other pool toys.
- Learn how to dive properly by taking classes.

## Water safety in other bodies of water

Swimming in a pool is different from swimming in other bodies of water. In addition to rules for pool safety, parents and children should know the rules for swimming in oceans, lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams. *These include*

- Never swim without adult supervision.
- Never dive into water unless an adult who knows the depth of the water says it's OK.
- Never try water sports such as skiing, scuba diving, or snorkeling without instructions from a qualified teacher.
- Always use an approved personal flotation device (life jacket) when boating, riding on a personal watercraft, fishing, waterskiing, or playing in a river or stream.
- Never swim around anchored boats, in motor boat lanes, or where people are water skiing.
- Never swim during electrical storms.
- If you swim or drift far from shore, stay calm and tread water, or float on your back until help arrives.
- Water wings and other blow-up swimming aids should not be used in place of life vests.
- Other water hazards found near many homes include canals, ditches, post holes, wells, fish ponds, and fountains. Watch your child closely if your child is playing near any of these areas.

## Life jackets and life preservers

If your family enjoys spending time on the water, make sure everyone wears an approved personal flotation device or life jacket. Some people think life jackets are hot, bulky, and ugly. However, today's models look and feel better and protect better. Many states require the use of life jackets and life preservers. They must be present on all boats traveling in water supervised by

## Don't drink and swim

Swimmers are at serious risk of drowning when they drink alcohol or use other drugs while swimming, diving, and playing water sports. These activities require clear thinking, coordination, and the ability to judge distance, depth, speed, and direction. Alcohol impairs all of these skills. People who are supervising other swimmers should not be using alcohol or drugs.

the US Coast Guard. Remember, without wearing a life jacket, your child is not protected.

*Keep the following tips in mind:*

- A life jacket should not be used in place of adult supervision.
- Choose a life jacket that fits your child's weight and age. It should be approved by the US Coast Guard and tested by Underwriters Laboratories (UL). Check the label to be sure. The label should also say whether the jacket is made for an adult or a child.
- Teach your child how to put on her own life jacket and make sure it is worn the right way.
- Blow-up water wings, toys, rafts, and air mattresses should never be used as life jackets or life preservers.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

From your doctor

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