

Did you know that drowning is preventable? Many of you have seen the video of the toddler floating on his back fully clothed in a pool on the internet. Tara Holly of Brandon had a similar experience one Christmas with Lofton, her then 3 year old son. Lofton and his older brother were riding their scooters around their pool. They were not supposed to be in the pool area but had come through the garage door from the front yard. Mom told them to go back to the front yard and as she walked into the house, her older son ran in the house yelling that Lofton was in the pool. Tara ran to the pool and Lofton was already holding on to the side and she pulled him out. He had fallen fully clothed, scooter and all into the deep end of their pool. Because he had been taking swim lessons at Maleys, not only did he know how to rollover on his back, he knew how to turn around and swim to the side and climb out. It was 50 degrees and the water was cold. Since he had been taking once a week lessons in the fall, knowing what to do was fresh on his mind because he practiced those survival techniques weekly. Nearly 70% of all children that suffered from submersion were not expected to be at, near or in the water yet they were found in the water. As parents we want to protect our children from every possible danger. Often times REALLY knowing how to swim gets lost in the shuffle of busy schedules. Many good parents don't realize how prevalent childhood drowning is (the leading cause of accidental death for children 5 years and under, the second leading cause of death for 14 years and under) they believe they always watch their children and it couldn't happen to them. But the reality is: Most drowning deaths occur in home pools, 70% of the children had been seen by one or both parents (75%) in the last 5 minutes, and it is "silent" as there is no cry for help. Here are some pointers on what a parent can do to guard their children from a potential water tragedy:

1. Teach your child to REALLY SWIM in quality on-going swim lessons just like gymnastics or piano. 8 lessons every summer is not enough to instill year-round confidence for those unexpected submersions when it is cold outside. Could you learn to do anything with confidence in only 8 lessons? Soccer, baseball, dance, cheer, etc. are important, but can these lessons save your child's life? As Dr. William Sorey, MD said in a letter to the editor of the Clarion – Ledger about swim lessons, it was shameful that Mississippi's drowning rate is twice the national average. Mississippians are not safety-minded and he challenged the parents and grandparents to step up to the plate on swimming lessons to teach children how to survive in the water.
2. You need to have as many layers of protection as possible to reduce the risk of drowning. If a child manages to get through one barrier – the next one will kick in. A fence that separates the house from the pool so children can't walk out of the house and into the pool can prevent 65% of pediatric drowning or near-drowning. You also need a perimeter fence around your pool. These should be a minimum of 5 feet high, self-closing, self-latching and locked with vertical bars. Openings in the fence should be no more than 4 inches wide so a child cannot climb over it. Be sure the gate opens away from the pool and the latch is at the top so children can't reach it. Gate and door alarms add an additional layer of protection.
3. Never leave anything a child could use to climb over the fence or toys in or around the pool that would entice them to get into the pool area. Don't let them ride toys around the pool deck.

4. All doors and windows need to be locked with alarms set at all times to alert the parent if they are opened. In the real world there are lapses where doors and windows are left open, unlocked and alarms aren't always set.
5. Keep a phone by the pool so you don't have to leave to answer it and in case of an emergency, 911 can quickly be called. Drowning can occur in the time it takes to answer the phone while leaving children alone in the pool.
6. Always assign an adult "Water Watcher" who is able to swim. Many tragedies happen although everybody is *watching* the pool, especially at pool parties, actually *no one is*. The "Water Watcher" never takes his eyes off the pool or leaves the pool area without a replacement. Continuously scans the water's surface and pool bottom. Avoids all poolside chats, eating, talking on the phone and other distractions. Stops all unsafe diving, playing and running. Locates and learns how to use pool safety equipment. CPR trained and First Aid certified. Not only do all caregivers need CPR, but they need to be able to swim well enough to get a child off the bottom of the pool.
7. A child should never be considered or treated as "water-safe" despite his swim skills. You must always maintain constant *eye* supervision.
8. Teach children proper behavior around water.
9. Floatation devices do not protect children. Children can easily slip out or remove "floaties" or "floaties" can be defective. "Floaties" give parents and children a false sense of security. Parents think "floaties" are keeping their children water-safe. If children are not used to having their face in the water, an unexpected immersion can cause panic. Children have no incentive to learn to swim, nor do they understand the properties of water. No effort is required on their part to move all over the pool as long as their "floaties" are holding them up. The consequences can be tragic when relying on "floaties" to keep children water-safe. The only true personal flotation devices are those approved by the US Coast Guard and should always be worn when boating.
10. Never dive in shallow or murky water.
11. Teach your family "Reach, Throw, Don't Go". Throw a floating object to a struggling swimmer and then get an adult immediately. They should not attempt to swim to a struggling swimmer.
12. Teach your family not to play the deadly game of seeing how far they can swim without a breath. Shallow water blackout (prolonged breath holding) occurs when the swimmer resists the urge to come up for a breath and can cause injury or death. The practice of hypoxic training should be banned in competitive swimming drills.
13. Pools and large bodies of water are not the only water dangers. Babies and toddlers can drown in small amounts of water such as toilets, bathtubs, buckets of water, and wading pools. Keep toilet lids shut and use toilet locks. Empty all buckets, containers, and wading pools immediately after use and store them upside down.

14. If your child is missing look first in the water – go to the edge, scan the bottom and corners. Children’s adventures sometimes put them in harm’s way. By their nature they tend to act without thinking of the consequences.
15. For every child who drowns, four are hospitalized and 16 receive care for near drowning, many with catastrophic conditions.
16. To participate or not to participate? This is not an option or a child’s choice. Children don’t have the judgment to understand swim lessons teach necessary life-saving skills needed through out a lifetime to avoid drowning and near-drowning tragedies. Having your child become a strong swimmer could save his life or your grandchild’s life!
17. When is enough, enough? “Children must be taught beyond mastery to automaticity (over-learning) in order to perform accurately and quickly under **real-world conditions**, such as a child falling into a pool with no adult supervision” (Master’s Thesis resulting from 7 years of research by Lana Whitehead, Arizona State University, May 1991). In 2004 the Consumer Product Safety Commission held hearings on pool and spa safety. The grieving parents of drowning victims told the commission they want anti-drowning education for parents to be as prevalent as the message to put children in car safety seats or not to drive drunk. One Mom, Carole de Ibern of Florida, told of her 5-year-old son falling into the pool of a friend while the adults were momentarily distracted in 1995. Her son was left brain-damaged and unable to walk or talk, he died at 13 from pneumonia. She said, “People tell me all you have to do is supervise your kids. I was as vigilant as any parent could be because I cherished my kids.”

The best way to avoid a tragedy is to be prepared. I strongly believe educating your family on water safety and giving your children the tools to survive a potential water tragedy is the best prevention. We at the Maley Swim School have partnered with the Safer 3 Coalition. Safer 3 provides a multi-layered approach to drowning prevention. Drowning is preventable! Please stop by Maley Swim School or visit our website (www.maleyswimschool.com) to learn more about the Safer 3 message.