

Drowning Prevention through Education

By: Linda Maley, owner of the Maley Swim School

You may not worry about pediatric drowning. You may not worry about it because you don't have a pool, or live near a body of water. You may not worry about it because you think your children are adequately trained. You may not worry about pediatric drowning because you believe you will always supervise your children poolside. Think again!

- ❑ In the time it takes to grab a towel (10 seconds), a child could become submerged!
- ❑ In the time it takes to answer the phone (2 minutes), a child could lose consciousness!
- ❑ In the time it takes to answer the door (4-6 minutes), a submerged child could sustain permanent brain damage!

The majority of pediatric drowning occurs in home swimming pools, and one or both parents had seen the child within the last 5 minutes!

Drowning is the leading cause of accidental death of children age 5 and under. It is the second leading cause of accidental death in children 14 and under. Because of these staggering statistics, I strongly believe in educating families on drowning prevention strategies. Drowning is preventable! The best way to avoid a tragedy is to be prepared! Educating your family on water safety is the best prevention. We at Maley Swim School have partnered with the Safer 3 Coalition, and Safer 3 provides a multi-layered approach to drowning prevention with three basic elements of safety:

I. SAFER WATER – Install, maintain and utilize proper fencing, gates, gate latches, alarms and other safety equipment around the pool.

- ❑ Fences should be at least five feet high, separating the pool from the residence.
- ❑ The area surrounding the fence should be clear of objects that could aid a child in climbing over.
- ❑ Gates should be self-closing and self-latching. The latch should be installed at the top of the gate, out of the reach of children.
- ❑ Every door and window allowing pool access should be locked at all times.
- ❑ Additional layers of protection include: safety covers, gate alarms, door alarms, and motion-detection devices.
- ❑ The use of multiple layers of protection can significantly reduce pediatric pool drowning and near-drowning.

II. SAFER KIDS – Employ constant adult supervision and swim skill attainment through on-going qualified instruction. Learn proper behavior in and around the water.

- ❑ Children and adults alike should learn to swim and maintain these skills year-round.
- ❑ Always assign an adult “Water-Watcher” who is able to swim. Children should never be left in or near a pool unattended, not even for a minute.
- ❑ Teach children and water-watchers “the pool rules” and appropriate behavior to be used in and around a pool. Post and obey all pool rules.
- ❑ Do not rely on floatation devices; a child can easily slip out of them or even remove them. *“Floaties” allow a false sense of security in the water. Children have no incentive to learn to swim, nor do they understand the properties of water. Children become dependent on “floaties”, because they can “swim” anywhere in the pool, including the deep end. The consequences can be tragic if the child forgets to put them on, takes them off, or they are defective. “Floaties” also hold children in the incorrect swimming position: diagonal, feet down, head back, and face out of the water. If a child is not used to having their face in the water, immersion can cause panic.*
- ❑ A child should never be considered or treated as “water-safe”. This causes a false sense of security and lack of supervision.

III. SAFER RESPONSE - Learn CPR, first-aid, and rescue techniques. Keep an emergency action plan and phone by the pool at all times.

- ❑ Always be ready for an emergency.
- ❑ Prepare and share an emergency action plan.
- ❑ Adults, caretakers and children should learn CPR, first-aid and rescue techniques.
- ❑ Keep rescue equipment such as shepherd's hook, life-saving ring and CPR sign mounted by the pool.
- ❑ Post and know all emergency numbers such as 9-1-1.
- ❑ Have a phone next to the pool to call 9-1-1 in case of an emergency and prevent the "Water-Watcher" from leaving the pool area to answer a phone call.

What is a "Water-Watcher"?

- ❑ Never take their eyes off the pool or leave the pool area without a replacement.
- ❑ Continuously scan the water's surface and pool bottom.
- ❑ Avoid all poolside chats, eating, talking on the phone and all other distractions.
- ❑ Stop all unsafe diving, playing and running.
- ❑ Locate and learn how to use pool safety equipment.
- ❑ CPR trained and First Aid certified.
- ❑ Keep a phone by the pool for emergency use only.
- ❑ Limit the number of swimmers and get help before letting anyone in the water.

Teach pool rules and safety behaviors to your family!

- ❑ Never allow you or your children to swim alone.
- ❑ Look in the pool or body of water first when a child is missing.
- ❑ Teach children to look you in the eyes and ask permission before entering the water.
- ❑ Never run or have riding toys on or near a pool deck.
- ❑ Make sure there are no toys left in the pool or pool area, as they can easily draw a child's attention.
- ❑ Never dive in shallow or murky water.
- ❑ 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 the struggling swimmer.
- ❑ The only true personal flotation devices are those approved by the US Coast Guard and should always be worn when boating by everyone regardless of their swim skills.
- ❑ Even experienced swimmers must be aware of other water dangers, such as shallow water blackouts. Prolonged breath holding can result in injury or death when the swimmer resists the urge to come up for a breath. Teach your family not to play the deadly game of seeing how far they can swim without a breath.
- ❑ 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.

With children we must take a multi-layered approach to water safety so that when one barrier is broken the next one will kick in. For instance, a mother told me that she thought her 3 year old was napping, when the house alarm startled her. The toddler had unlocked the back door and let himself out. She went out the door and noticed that the pool gate was left open by the repairman from the day before. By the time she reached him, he had fallen in after his ball and the pool alarm was sounding. Even though this family put up many barriers between the home and the pool, the child still made it into the pool before the mother could stop him. Fortunately, because he had been taking year round swim lessons, he was able to reach the side and climb out. This is a technique Maley Swim School incorporates into all of our lessons, from our Waterbabies to Strokes. Mom was relieved that she did not have to use CPR.

Drowning is the single largest cause of accidental death of children five and under. If our efforts in promoting this message make a difference in saving one life, it's all worthwhile.

For additional information on water safety and swimming lessons, contact the Maley Swim School by phone at 898-SWIM (8978) or online at www.MaleySwimSchool.com