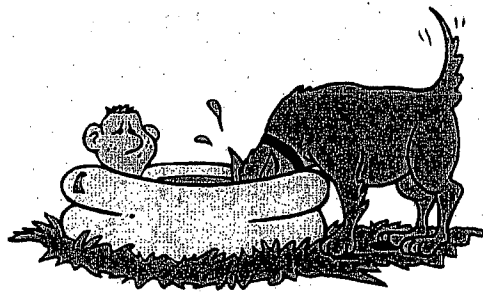


Children and Water Safety



CHILDREN AND WATER SAFETY

Drowning is a major cause of death for children. The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) reports that 300 children under five years of age Drown each year in residential swimming pools and more than 2000 children in this age group are treated in hospitals for submersion injuries, often involving severe brain damage.

In a study involving Arizona, California and Florida the CPSC found the following:

- 75% of submersion victims were between the ages of 1-3.
- 65% of this group were boys.
- Toddlers appeared to be at the greatest risk as their capabilities change daily and caregivers can underestimate them.
- At the time of the incidents, most victims were being supervised by one or both parents.
- 69% of the children were not expected to be at or in the pool, yet they were found in the water.
- 65% of the injuries occurred to children in pools owned by the child's family, 33% in pools owned by friends or relatives.
- 75% of the victims were missing from their caregiver's sight for 5 minutes or less.

KIDSAFE, a national child safety organization, states that child drownings can best be prevented by following these three steps:

- STEP ONE: SPOT THE HAZARD
- STEP TWO: ASSESS THE RISK
- STEP THREE: MAKE CHANGES QUICKLY

STEP ONE: SPOT THE HAZARD

In looking for the hazards which could lead to the drowning of a child follow the basic strategy:

- Look for accidents about to happen; identify all water hazards at the home.
- Don't ignore anything that may seem even slightly dangerous.
- Whenever a child is near water, ask yourself, "Is there a safer way?"
- Could anything that contains water cause a child to drown?
- Are you or others behaving in a way that could lead to a child drowning?

STEP TWO: ASSESS THE RISK

Whenever you Spot a Hazard - STOP and THINK - ask yourself:

- Can I get rid of the hazard, or use something safer?
- Can I make it safe by repairing, modifying or isolating it?
- Can I make sure people, especially children, are aware of the problem, and are given clear rules on how to avoid being harmed?
- Can I provide quality supervision of children to ensure there is no risk of drowning?

STEP THREE: MAKE CHANGES QUICKLY

Once you spot a water safety hazard and decide on a solution, don't delay in implementing it. If you ignore a hazard long enough it will become MORE not LESS dangerous. People become complacent or forget it is there and cease to be vigilant around it.

KIDSAFE recommends the following strategies be practiced in all homes with all children all the time:

- ALWAYS watch children near water.
- Take the child with you if you answer the phone at bath time.
- Indoor spas should have a lockable door and be emptied immediately after use. Outdoor spas should be fenced in the same way as swimming pools.
- Empty wading pools immediately after use.

- With empty wading pools, wheelbarrows, pails etc., turn them over or stand them up so rainwater can't collect in them.
- Don't allow ANY water to stand on a pool cover. A person will slide into the center and the water will pool, quickly reaching 7-10 inches in depth. Algae will quickly grow on a wet cover, making them extremely slick.
- Even an adult can get caught UNDER a pool cover, become disoriented and drown.
- Cover post holes or trenches during building.
- Cover outdoor ponds with a fixed grill.
- After heavy rain, check your yard and empty any water that has collected in containers.
- Remember that floatation devices are not lifesaving devices. Stay with your child when swimming in the pool.
- Learn to give resuscitation or take a refresher course. In an emergency, take the child to the phone and call an ambulance. Directions will be given over the phone.
- When visiting, ask about any drowning hazards. Many children have drowned at friends' homes because parents didn't know there was a pool, spa or pond on the property.

After a drowning or submersion injury parents and caregivers often state that they were only momentarily distracted. By identifying common distractions and developing strategies to deal with them ahead of time injuries could be prevented.

BEWARE OF DEADLY DISTRACTIONS

- Telephone calls, either incoming or outgoing
- Doorbells
- Something cooking, overheating, etc. laundry
- Another child making a mess, crying, falling etc.
- Other children fighting, running, etc.
- The other child's diaper that needs changing
- The other child you have to give a bottle to
- The pet that causes a mess, runs around, gets in a fight or wants to come in.

POOLS AND SPAS

The U.S. Product Safety Commission (USPSC) estimates that 490 people drowned last year in private swimming pools, over 300 of these were children. It is vital that children are protected around all pools, spas and hot tubs. WAC 388-73-103 states that all pools shall be fenced with a locking gate, that children's wading pools will be emptied and cleaned daily, that hot tubs and spas will be made inaccessible to children when not in use and that children shall be supervised when around pools, spas or hot tubs at all times.

There are several ways to protect children from the danger of drowning in pool, hot tubs and spas.

BARRIERS

Fences are often used to secure pools when not in use. When fencing a pool it is essential that the pool be fenced on all sides. When a wall serves as one "leg" of the fencing it cannot include a window that could allow a child access to the pool area. The USPSC recommends that the fencing be at least 5 feet high, though DLR is at present requiring fencing to be at least 4 feet high. There should be no vertical opening in the fence that is more than 4 inches wide. If chain link fencing is used no "diamond-shaped opening" should be larger than $1 \frac{3}{4}$ inches. The fencing should be constructed in such a way that children cannot easily climb it and so that the pool is clearly visible from the house at all times.

The gate in the pool fence should be self-closing, the gate should have a self-latching mechanism in proper working order. The latching mechanism should be placed high enough on the gate as to be out of the reach of children.

Doors that access the general area of the pool should be kept locked. The doors should have a locking mechanism placed at least five feet above the door. A pressure-bar can be placed near the top of a sliding glass door to secure it is necessary. Door alarms can also be used.

Pool covers are not considered safety devices for in ground pools. As previously described the covers can collect water and become slippery becoming a hazard themselves. Pool covers, if used, should be completely removed when the pool is in use so that a child cannot be trapped under a portion of the cover and drown.

Power safety pool covers can be used as a SECOND level of protection (like a door alarm) but cannot be relied upon to protect children on their own. A power safety cover must be labeled as strong enough to support the weight of two adults and a child so as to allow for a rescue should an individual fall on the cover.

Steps should be removed from spas and above ground pools when not in use.

Non-portable spas should be treated as swimming pools in terms of securing them by fencing unless the spa is fitted with a locking cover. If a locking cover is used it should be securely locked at all times when not in use. The cover should be strong enough to support the child's weight without cracking and should be placed no greater than 4 inches above the rim of the spa or hot tub. Ideally the locking cover should fit snugly on top of the spa.

SUPERVISION

The surest form of protection for children in and around pools and spas is constant, responsible, adult supervision. Instruct all babysitters of the water hazards, the safety precautions employed and the house rules that apply to water safety. Appoint one adult as the "designated watcher" when a group of persons are in the pool. It is risky to ever assume that someone else is watching a child in the water. When adults become preoccupied, children are at risk.

Do not use floatation devices as a substitute for supervision. Floatation devices can move, shift, lose air or otherwise leave a child in a dangerous situation.

If a child is missing check the pool first.

Caregivers must learn infant CPR, post emergency information and keep a phone nearby when anyone is in the pool. Maintain appropriate rescue equipment on hand and in good working order.

Do not leave toys in the pool after use as they might pose an irresistible attraction to children.

Parents and caregivers should carefully supervise all activities that involve children diving into a pool. Diving should never be allowed in an above ground pool or in any pool that has not been constructed to allow safe diving from a designated diving area. No child should be allowed to enter the water head first until he/she has been taught the correct way to dive from a qualified diving instructor.

DRAIN DANGERS

The USFSC reports incidents including deaths in which people's hair was sucked into the suction fitting drain of a spa, hot tub, or whirlpool bathtub, causing the victim's head to be held under water. The suction from the drain outlets is strong enough to cause entrapment of hair or body parts, and drowning. Most accidents with drain outlets involve people with hair that is shoulder-length or longer. In several incidents, children were playing a "hold your breath the longest" game, leaning forward into the water and permitting their long hair to be sucked into the drain.

Drain covers are one solution to this problem. A drain cover should meet the standard (ASME/ANSI A112.19.8M-1987) and can be purchased through most pool supply retailers.

Keep long hair away from the suction fitting drain cover. Have children wear bathing caps or pin their hair up when swimming. Never allow children to play in a way that could permit the child's hair to come near the drain cover. If the cover is broken or missing do not permit children to use the spa or hot tub until it is replaced.

WADING POOLS

As previously discussed, wading pools must be emptied and cleaned after each day's use. Children cannot be left unattended in a wading pool. Wading pool should be turned upside down after each use to prevent rainwater from collecting there and posing a hazard to children.

OUTDOOR/DECORATIVE PONDS

The Hozelock Cyprio company which manufactures pond products recommends that parents and caregivers of young child think very carefully about installing a pond as even a very shallow pond can be hazardous.

Alternatives can include a water feature that does not create a pool of water. A very shallow stream with a circulating pump where the water drops into a covered and locked container can be constructed safely. Gravel can be added to an existing pond to bring the water to a depth of less than two inches and still support some plant and fish life but pose less of a hazard to children.

A metal grill should be firmly fixed over the pond to prevent children or animals from falling in. It is not recommended that ponds just be fenced as this can lead to a false sense of security and the water could still be accessible to an adventurous child.

Many decorative ponds have electrical pumps or lighting. All electrical fixtures should be professionally installed and well maintained at all times.

OTHER HAZARDS

Pooled water of even 2-3 inches can pose a drowning hazard to a very young child. Never leave a child unattended in a bathtub even if only shallowly filled. Keep toilet lids closed at all times. Toilet lid locks are available for purchase from baby supply retailers. Empty mop bucket, ice chests or pails of water immediately after use. Do not allow children to play near ponds,

storm drains or excavated areas. Install protective covers over wells and cisterns.

A child playing near a stream, lake or river should be supervised by a capable, responsible adult who is never more than an arms-length away from the child. Life jackets should be worn at all times and should meet or exceed the standards set by the US Coast Guard which will be printed on the label. Life jackets should be selected to be appropriate for the child's size and weight and for the activity the child will be participating in. Caregivers should keep a close eye on the weather when supervising children near water out of doors. Because water conducts electricity, stop swimming or boating as soon as you see or hear a storm.

Swimming and water safety courses are recommended for all children but should never take the place of the above described safety measures AND close adult supervision. Don't assume that children will use good judgement and caution around water.