

TODDLERS AND BACKYARD POOLS

Parents and grandparents whose children have drowned say the day of the tragedy started out just like any other day. No matter how the drowning happened, one thing was the same: the three tragic minutes that claimed their child's life slid silently, without warning, and can never be brought back.

Learn the principles and practices needed to safeguard children in, and around, water.

PRINCIPLES:

• Toddlers and Water

Curiosity, rapidly-changing skills and an inability to understand danger place young children at high risk. Toddlers explore and test their environment while imitating adult behavior, but are unaware of the dangers of water and are usually without the swimming skills to stay afloat.

• What constitutes an accident?

The simplistic idea that 'proper' supervision is enough to prevent a pool drowning inherently implies that humans are flawless.

Caregiver distraction is a contributing factor to all toddler drownings. Often in the form of a sibling in trouble or demanding attention, it is an unpredictable and powerful force. Know your own limitations and that of others, and operate within them.

• Reasons why pool drowning happens to "typical" families

"Proper" supervision at a private home or condo with a pool is usually not construed to mean a professional life-guard on duty during open hours and a diligently-maintained high fence barrier. In practice, "proper" supervision needs to be supplemented by other layers of protection. Yet, many homes do not have other layers of protection.

The biggest reason why pool drowning happens to "typical" families is that "typical" families believe "proper" supervision is sufficient. That's why the U.S. Consumer Products Safety Association states that "Supervision can and does fail...Layers of protection work."

PRACTICES:

• Coordinated 24/7 supervision

Notwithstanding its limitations, there is no substitute for active and coordinated supervision of young children near water. A toddler with direct access to water



is only safe during actual moments of eye contact with a caregiver. Broken eye contact opens the door to caregiver distraction.

• Layers of Protection

Layers of protection [1] between children and water either impede the child or warn the parent. Like supervision, they are not equally foolproof. In addition to property fencing, every backyard pool should have the following safety devices:

1. Approved four-sided pool fence with self-latching gate
2. Pool safety cover
3. Approved door alarm
4. On every pool access
5. Pool alarm

1. Layers of protection that are not disabled [and need to be enabled] by pool users, including older children and teenagers, are preferred.

2. Permanent or removable mesh, such as Lifesaver Pool Fence, may be used. Lawn chairs, BBQs, pool toys, etc. should be outside the pool fence. Fence security is enhanced by a wireless gate alarm, such as Safety Turtle.

3. Children less than 24 months old are most apt to head for the pool while still in the area or shortly thereafter. An automatic pool safety cover is much preferred to a manual safety cover, as it can be deployed by a single caregiver before leaving a pool unattended.

4. A door alarm that beeps all the time is much less effective than a true alarm. This mandates an adult bypass switch, such as Pool Guard or Safety Turtle.

5. A pool alarm is your last layer of protection. An approved subsurface alarm sounds within 20 seconds after a child weighing more than 19 pounds enters. Subsurface alarms are deactivated during pool use and are not compatible with moving water features, such as spas, or very windy conditions. A personal immersion alarm, such as Safety Turtle, also falls under the approved pool alarm category. Originally conceived for use with backyard pools, personal immersion alarms are now used to reduce injury and death resulting from any accidental immersion - of a child, adult or pet, at home and away.

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