



SWIM SAFETY TIPS

1. NEVER SWIM ALONE

Swimming should only happen when a lifeguard is on duty. Lifeguards don't just watch the people in the pool, lake or ocean. Their job is also to watch the water and advise swimmers on any safety concerns and questionable conditions that might arise. They are also trained to respond quickly when something happens.

In addition to swimming with a lifeguard nearby, a good rule of thumb — for children and adults — is to use the buddy system while swimming. Instruct your child to always swim with a friend or sibling so they can look out for one another if their parents aren't physically in the pool with them. Besides being more fun to swim with a friend, this also ensures there is someone who can go for help if something goes wrong.

2. SUPERVISE CHILDREN WHEN THEY'RE IN THE WATER

We understand that parents need to relax too. But when your children are in the water, it's time to be alert. As a general rule of thumb, a parent should be within arm's reach of a young child at all times. This rule is true whether they're swimming in a pool, lake, ocean or bathtub. Parents of older children should stay close and keep eyes on their children at all times. Even ones who are strong swimmers need supervision because they're prone to trying tricks, flips and dives — all things that can be dangerous in the water.

The best way to remain vigilant when your children are swimming is to put your phone away, and simply enjoy hanging out with each other! If other adults are present, you can take turns watching the pool, so everyone gets an equal chance to relax. Working together to protect your children is the best way to prevent an accident.

3. DON'T PLAY BREATH-HOLDING GAMES

While swimming, children shouldn't hold their breath for a long time, as this can cause drowning and has several other severe risks. Make sure children understand competing to see who can hold their breath underwater, and other similar games, can be dangerous and should not be part of any water-related activities.

If a swimmer holds their breath too long or hyperventilates before going underwater — meaning they are breathing deeper or faster — they are at a higher risk of passing out underwater. Children who swim competitively should learn proper breathing techniques to avoid problems during practices or meets.

4. ALWAYS WEAR A LIFE VEST

Young children or inexperienced swimmers should always wear a Coast Guard-certified life jacket around water. There are plenty of products on the market claiming to help children stay afloat, such as water wings, floaties, pool noodles, etc., but these are not a substitute for life preservers or lifesaving devices in a genuine emergency. Use these products only when a parent or trustworthy adult is within arm's length of the child using them.

Also, remember a life jacket or other flotation device should never be an excuse to ignore other water safety guidelines. Life jackets alone are not enough when it comes to staying safe around water.

5. DON'T JUMP IN THE WATER TO SAVE A FRIEND

If a child sees their friend struggling to keep their head above water, their first instinct may be to jump in to help. However, doing so could lead to both people drowning. The Y's Safety Around Water program recommends the reach, throw, don't go technique, which involves using a long object to pull a struggling swimmer to safety. By using this technique, children can help their friend without putting themselves at risk.



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6. ENTER THE WATER FEET FIRST

Severe injuries can occur when kids jump or dive headfirst into shallow water. Make sure your child understands the proper way to enter and exit the pool. If they're interested in jumping and diving, make sure to teach them the correct way to do it, as well as point out the areas where it is safe to do so. If your pool does not have an area designated for diving, do not allow it, no matter how deep the water.

7. STAY AWAY FROM POOL DRAINS

It is a good idea to show your child what the pool drain looks like and explain to them the importance of staying clear before they even begin playing. Children's hair, bathing suits and even limbs have become stuck in broken or faulty drains, which can lead to drowning or serious injury. Teach children to stay away from these areas in pools, especially if a drain is missing a cover or appears otherwise broken. If you notice one that seems to be operating incorrectly, report it immediately.

8. STAY WITHIN DESIGNATED SWIM AREAS

Whether you're swimming in a pool, ocean or lake, staying within the designated swim areas is vital to staying safe. Teach children about ropes and why people use them to divide a pool. Never encourage a child to swim in water deeper than their abilities will allow, and, especially if you're swimming in a lake or ocean, always follow guidelines local lifeguards have established. They are familiar with the water and, in the case of lakes and oceans, know enough about how it changes from day to day to make wise and up-to-date safety recommendations.

9. AVOID USING ALCOHOL

This advice applies mainly to older children and parents. As children become teens, talking with them about alcohol becomes more and more essential. Alcohol impairs judgment, coordination and balance. It affects a person's ability to swim well, and it can even lower body temperature. Images of teens and young adults enjoying alcohol poolside are common on television and in movies, leaving your real-life teens a dangerous picture to copy, so make sure your teens understand the truth behind mixing water play with alcohol.

Parents should also use caution. Never consume alcohol while you're supervising your children in the water. Not only can it cause you to become distracted, but it could leave you unable to function appropriately if an emergency should happen.

10. LEARN CPR

While we hope your family will follow all these guidelines and stay safe in the water, the unfortunate truth is that accidents happen. If a drowning incident or pool-related accident occurs, bystanders are typically the first available to react and respond. As a parent supervising children, it's critical for you to be familiar with lifesaving techniques, including CPR for children and adults. Knowing how to perform CPR can be the difference between life and death. Get your CPR certification — and keep it up to date — through the American Red Cross, your local hospital or other community organizations.



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