

# SWIMMING POOL SAFETY



Home pools are becoming more common every day. They provide an excellent means of recreation for your entire family and friends a large part of the year.

**But beware; they are dangerous if not monitored properly.**

You must be aware of the potentially hazardous properties of a pool. An accessible pool is more dangerous for your toddler than a loaded gun laying out on your coffee table. In a child's hands eventually it will go off! But unlike the gun going off and where the bullet will strike, the outcome with a toddler falling into a pool undetected is almost certain.

Just how serious is the problem? Drowning is the number one cause of death for children under five in Florida, Arizona, and California with a ranking of number two for over a dozen other states. For every drowning there are eleven near drowning incidents, according to government statistics; many of which result in totally disabling brain damage.

The majority of the parents involved were responsible people who thought it could never happen to their family. They were careful and had close supervision over their children. Many were in good income brackets, educated, and could afford nice homes with pools in family oriented communities. So we are literally talking about people who could live next door to you.

If drowning were a disease it truly would be referred to as an epidemic with all the public attention and awareness possible focused on an epidemic of such proportion.

**A study conducted by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission to find out how child drowning incidents occur indicates that: SUPERVISION CAN AND DOES FAIL.**

The investigation by the Commission was directed at children under age five in Arizona, California, and Florida who had drown in home swimming pools. **The results might help you to better understand why drowning is still the number one killer for three states and stands at number two for the nation:**

**Who was in charge of supervision at the time of drowning?**

69 percent of the accidents occurred while one or both parents were responsible for supervision.

10 percent were adults other than the parents.

14 percent were sitters.

7 percent siblings

**What was the location of the pool drowning?**

65 percent were in a pool owned by the child's family.

22 percent at a relatives

11 percent happened at a neighbor's.

**Drowning happens quickly and without warning. There is no cry for help.**

***77 percent of the children had been seen 5 minutes or less before being missed and subsequently discovered in the pool.***

*Where were they last seen?*

46 percent WERE LAST SEEN IN THE HOUSE prior to being found in the pool. Of these, 15 percent were thought to be sleeping.

23 percent were last seen in the yard, porch or patio, not in the pool area. That's a total of 69 percent that were thought not to be in the pool area.

31 percent were last seen in the pool or pool area.

**What activity was the person responsible for supervision involved in at the time of drowning?**

39 percent were doing chores.

18 percent socializing.

9 percent were busy on the telephone.

**The suddenness of this type of accident and the results it yields is devastating to anyone it touches. When you think pool; think hard core. Even if this is not your personality; you must be an absolute dictator. Let your children know without any doubts, that is your way or none at all.**

LAYERS OF PROTECTION

Supervision is always your primary layer of protection, but as the study shows, 69 percent of the drowning incidents occurred when parental supervision failed and there were not other "backup layers" in use.

Access doors to the pool area with high locks are a secondary layer of protection.

Alarms on access doors is another layer of protection.

A pool safety barrier (fence) separating the pool from your home and all access doors and entrances is one more layer of protection.

Water survival training for a child when he is capable of crawling or walking to the pool.

CPR and your knowledge of rescue techniques are a final layer of protection should there be an accident.

**The goal, with instituted layers of protection, is to come as close to a "fail safe" system of preventing drowning incidents as possible. Meaning that if there is a momentary lapse of supervision for whatever reason, we have several backup systems in place. All must fail before a drowning can take place. A door has been left unlocked or open; the alarm system or device for the door has been turned off; the pool safety barrier has been left open; your child does enter the water, panics and does not attempt to utilize survival swim training; CPR is administered too late to save the child.**

***THERE CAN BE NO COMPROMISE ON POOL SAFETY. YOU ARE DEALING, LITERALLY, WITH A LIFE AND DEATH SITUATION***

Set down definite pool rules covering its use and more importantly, when it is not in use. We all have a tendency to give a little leeway on this or that with our children, but not when it comes to the pool.

**Any door leading to the pool area should be kept locked.** Even, if your home is equipped with

an alarm system that will beep when perimeter doors are opened, install simple contact alarms on the more often used doors as a further safeguard. Pool Guard makes an excellent alarm designed strictly for access doors to the pool area. This type of alarm must have the button pushed whenever the door is opened and has a delay feature to keep it from sounding off for seven seconds for entering from the inside. It is particularly useful if you have older children who open doors to the pool area. Sliding glass doors should be locked at the top in addition to other locks. In two thirds of the drowning cases studied where children were thought to be in the home, sliding glass doors were either left open or opened by the toddler.

**If you own a pool this is a must! Install a protective safety barrier or pool fence that will eliminate access to the pool for young children and pets.**

Floating pool alarm devices with remote alarms sounding in the home can alert you to a child falling into the pool. The pool surface, however, must be disturbed enough by the fall so as to set off the alarm. Since these alarms do work off a disturbance to the surface of the pool; your child could quietly walk down the steps, go under, drown, and never disturb the alarm or set it off!!! They are quite inexpensive (around \$100) and better than nothing at all since they do detect some accidental falls if adjusted and placed properly. Alarm batteries and function should be checked often to increase the safety margin and effectiveness of this type of device. If this is your choice of protection; be sure the model you purchase has a remote alarm that will sound in the house and a local alarm that will also alert someone near the pool area.

Another type of alarm on the market is designed to detect motion in the pool area with an infrared beam. These alarms are independent of your burglar alarm systems and are designed to be easily mounted outside without doing electrical work and have a remote alarm in the home that can be plugged into any electrical outlet. Optek is one manufacturer of this type of alarm.

**Have your toddler trained for pool survival when he is able to crawl or walk to your pool.**

This is introductory training to the water that is not intended to actually teach him to swim, but more to provide the toddler with the necessary skills to help survive an accidental fall into the pool. He should be taught to negotiate to a wall or steps and know how to get out. His final lesson might include his being knocked unexpectedly into the pool fully clothed. Do not be alarmed, the child's reaction is being monitored to help determine if the lessons have been effective by using this simulated "panic situation". This type of survival training can usually be very effective after just a week of daily lessons.

Another method of water survival training is to teach the child to roll over and float on his back. It also is effective and has been taught successfully for many years. Be certain that he is also taught how to get to the side of the pool and hang on or get out in addition to learning to roll over and float.

You can determine which method will best suit your needs and the situation.

**All types of survival swim instruction must be reintroduced to the toddler after a period of not being in the pool; as in over the winter months.**

Whichever way you go, do not be lulled into thinking that your child can have open access to the pool area. Remember, this is just one layer of protection.

Every layer of protection possible must be in force at all times or the system is compromised.

**If you have read or been told that your child cannot be taught water survival until age three because he is incapable of learning at an earlier age, might get ear infections, that it "leads to a false sense of security for the parent", or that such training is ineffective "because 55 percent of toddlers who drown had received survival swim training"; please think for yourself!**

Your child can be taught survival swimming and will retain it during water active months with practice. If you do not have your child in the water over the winter months, particularly a child under age 3 years, he will require a refresher to "remember" what was learned the summer before. This will usually take only a few days to accomplish and then you can proceed on to have him learn additional techniques or start actual swimming lessons.

Yes, a large percentage of children who have drown did have survival swim training, what the statistics cannot show you is how many have survived a fall into the pool because of this training (many adults who drown could also swim). As to the "false sense of security", most parents will not even leave a toddler alone in a bathtub much less knowingly let their child near the pool unsupervised. U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's study revealed that 75 percent of the victims of drowning were among 12 and 35 months of age. For these children, 3 years old will never come.

**Take the time to learn CPR and accident procedures. If not your own child, you may be able to save someone else's. Many local fire departments and hospitals have programs for this type of training.**

Do not leave a toddler or young children in the pool or pool area without adult supervision. Older children are not always as sensitive to the dangers of drowning when it applies to others.

**Never go into the house to answer the telephone** and leave a child unattended in the pool area. Numerous drowning incidents are associated with the answering of a telephone in the house while the pool was in use by children.

A telephone installed at the pool area or the presence of a remote unit, on the other hand, could prove to be an invaluable aid in the event of an accident.

***Do not leave objects in the pool that could attract your child. Children who would not normally go near a pool because of fear may not even think about the water if they are in pursuit of a favorite toy in the pool.***

"Staging platforms", such as tables and chairs, should not be kept near the pool fence.

Allowing the pool area to be used as a play area is as bad as letting young children play in a busy street or with poisonous chemicals. Isolating the pool area to be used for swimming only is the most essential concept of drowning prevention.

**If you miss your child always check the pool first; even if access is thought to be restricted; then look elsewhere.**

**In a drowning accident seconds can make the difference between death, recovery, or just survival.**

## **KEEP THEM SAFE AND PLAY BY THE RULES**

Do not forget your "fail safe" minimum of five layers of protection against drowning. Adult supervision, locked doors, perimeter door alarms, the pool fence, and swimming lessons. All five must fail before your child can drown in your pool.

**A pool drowning is not an "accident", it is foreseeable and therefore preventable. "Could have, Should have, Would have" are pretty empty words if your child becomes a victim of this primary killer of children under five.**