



Swimming Safety

We are already into summer, and with the warmer weather, we are all enjoying the pools and the beach to cool off and have fun. Along with watching the children splash in the water, it is very important that we have safety in mind. As a pediatrician, it is always part of my daily practice to discuss water safety rules with every child and parent at their well visit, but this summer it is at the forefront of my mind. Over Memorial Day weekend, my friends from medical school lost their adorable nearly 3-year old boy due to a drowning accident, and this occurred in the presence of several physicians. As a parent, even hearing of this kind of tragedy makes your heart stop... and so, I use this as an opportunity to reiterate the importance of water safety:

1. Drowning is the #1 cause of unintentional injury deaths in children 1-4, and it is the #2 cause of unintentional injury death in children 5-9.
2. Children should be supervised at all times in and around the pool. If they are not strong swimmers (can swim 25 yards of front crawl without stopping, unassisted), they should be in a life jacket while on the pool deck.
3. All pools should have childproof fencing. Children should NEVER be on the pool deck, even with a lifejacket, without a grown up.
4. Make sure your children know they are NEVER allowed in the pool unless a grown up is SITTING NEXT TO THE POOL watching. I always emphasize with my patients, NOT EVEN a fingernail is allowed in the water unless a grown up is watching.
5. When on the pool deck, make sure to have open conversations between you and your spouse, friends, care-givers about who is watching the children in the pool. Many times parents/adults think the other is watching, a lot of accidents happen while everyone is right there on the pool deck.
6. Speak to young children with younger siblings about safety of their brother or sister. I make sure children know that if little Joey gets in the pool, they should RUN and YELL and TELL the closest grown up immediately. I emphasize that they should never try to go in the pool to get their brother/sister themselves, as many young ones think intuitively that the right thing to do would be to go in to help them, not realizing they themselves would be in trouble.
7. Swim lessons are a good idea. It is not always convenient to get to a pool for lessons, but it is SO important. Children who are not strong swimmers should be in swim lessons until they can swim well. You do not always have to start at 6 months old, but consider starting to teach water safety once they are walking and could walk themselves into a pool. My own child does not particularly like swimming lessons (loves the pool, just not lessons), but my message to her is that she only has to take swim lessons until she can swim 25 yards front and back crawl easily by herself. Then she can stop.
8. Stewie the Duck Learns to Swim by Kim and Stew Leonard with Dr. Lawrence E. Shapiro is a wonderful book about swimming safety to read as a family.
9. Healthychildren.org is a wonderful website by the AAP and has a lot of good information about pool safety and swimming.

-Nicole J. Gable, MD