

Water Safety Alert

How a Conversation at Home Could Save Your Child's Life at Camp

Drowning is a leading cause of accidental death among young people. So whether your son or daughter is headed to day camp or overnight camp this summer, you'll want to teach them basic water safety at home, before opening day.

Yes, high-quality camps should train all of their staff in emergency water rescue. They should categorize swimmers and place them in appropriate instructional groups and water depths. They should insist that children swim in buddy pairs...and follow other essential safety practices. They should. But they don't. Not always. They're human, so their attention wanes and their judgment falters.

I've been a camp waterfront director for nearly 25 years, so I've seen or made just about every aquatic mistake well-trained lifeguards make. And that experience has taught me the importance of redundancy. Safety systems need back-up safety systems. And that's where you, as a parent, come in.

When moms and dads participate in basic water safety preparation at home, campers behave more safely at camp. At a minimum, these are the steps you should take prior to opening day:

- Teach your child that playing in the water is fun, but should never be enjoyed alone. There must always be a properly-trained adult lifeguard present.
- Teach your child to enjoy the water in buddy pairs, never as singletons. This might be a parent-child buddy pair at the beach, under the watchful eye of a trained lifeguard. Or, it might be a pool party in the backyard, where every young guest has a swimming buddy.
- Teach your child to swim. Even the youngest day campers can learn to swim. Before the camp season starts, bring your child to some lessons at the local municipal pool, YMCA or club. Sure, children will become better swimmers at camp, but learning the basics prior to camp is a plus.
- Teach your child to swim only during daylight hours. Accidents are more likely when campers cannot judge depth, direction or bottom conditions in the darkness.
- Teach your child to tread water and perform the survival float, as well as to respond to a distressed swimmer with a reaching assist or a throwing assist. Even a kindergartener can save a life with a working knowledge of basic rescue techniques.
- Reinforce your expectation that your son or daughter will follow all of the camp's aquatic rules, such as: No Diving in Shallow Water, No Running on the Dock or Deck, Always Wear a Life Jacket in Boats, etc.

For parents who want a peek at how top-tier camp lifeguards should be trained, watch the free video entitled *Active Lifeguarding*, which you'll find by clicking "Sample Videos" on ExpertOnlineTraining.com. (ExpertOnlineTraining.com is where the best staff in the country

receive their pre-arrival training from the world's youth development experts.) As the video explains, having a lifeguard certification is no guarantee of competence. Lifeguards at your son or daughter's camp should not only participate in the water safety education on ExpertOnlineTraining.com, they should also complete a rigorous in-service training program *at camp* and participate in weekly back-boarding and lost bather drills.

Like wearing a seatbelt in the car or donning a helmet when riding a bicycle, following waterfront safety rules makes an exciting—but potentially dangerous—activity safer. What you start in your own bathtub, backyard pool or nearby shore can then be reinforced by your child's counselor or cabin leader. Or, if a distracted staff member fails to remind your child to don a life preserver before he or she launches out in a canoe, it won't matter. Your son or daughter will have already buckled on a properly-sized preserver, thanks to your conscientious coaching.

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