YOUTHFUL
WATER SAFETY

Teach Kids of Any Age How To Stay Safe When It Comes To Everything Water Related

Is your kid a water hound? Human beings aren't fish; we don't have flippers or gills.

We aren't typically born in the water, and we certainly don't want to die in it.

The thought of drowning, from an adult's perspective, is probably one of the scariest things imaginable.

We know the risks of going into the water, and the catastrophe that can occur in seconds.

The only thing more frightening than that, is the thought of your child drowning.

You might be surprised to learn that children are oblivious to the dangers of drowning.

In fact, most young children who drown, one of the leading causes of death for children under 5, seldom make a sound.

They don't splash around. They breathe in and tap out.

They don't have that reflex to fight against drowning, so they don't splash.

Toddlers can drown in an inch or two of water, and they'll never make a sound.

Do I have your attention?

You should also realize that 1500 children will likely drown this year, some of them in backyard swimming pools, and almost always as the result of an accident around the house or on a family outing.

Don't let your family become victim to a drowning incident.

This guide will provide some simple steps you can take to prevent drowning.
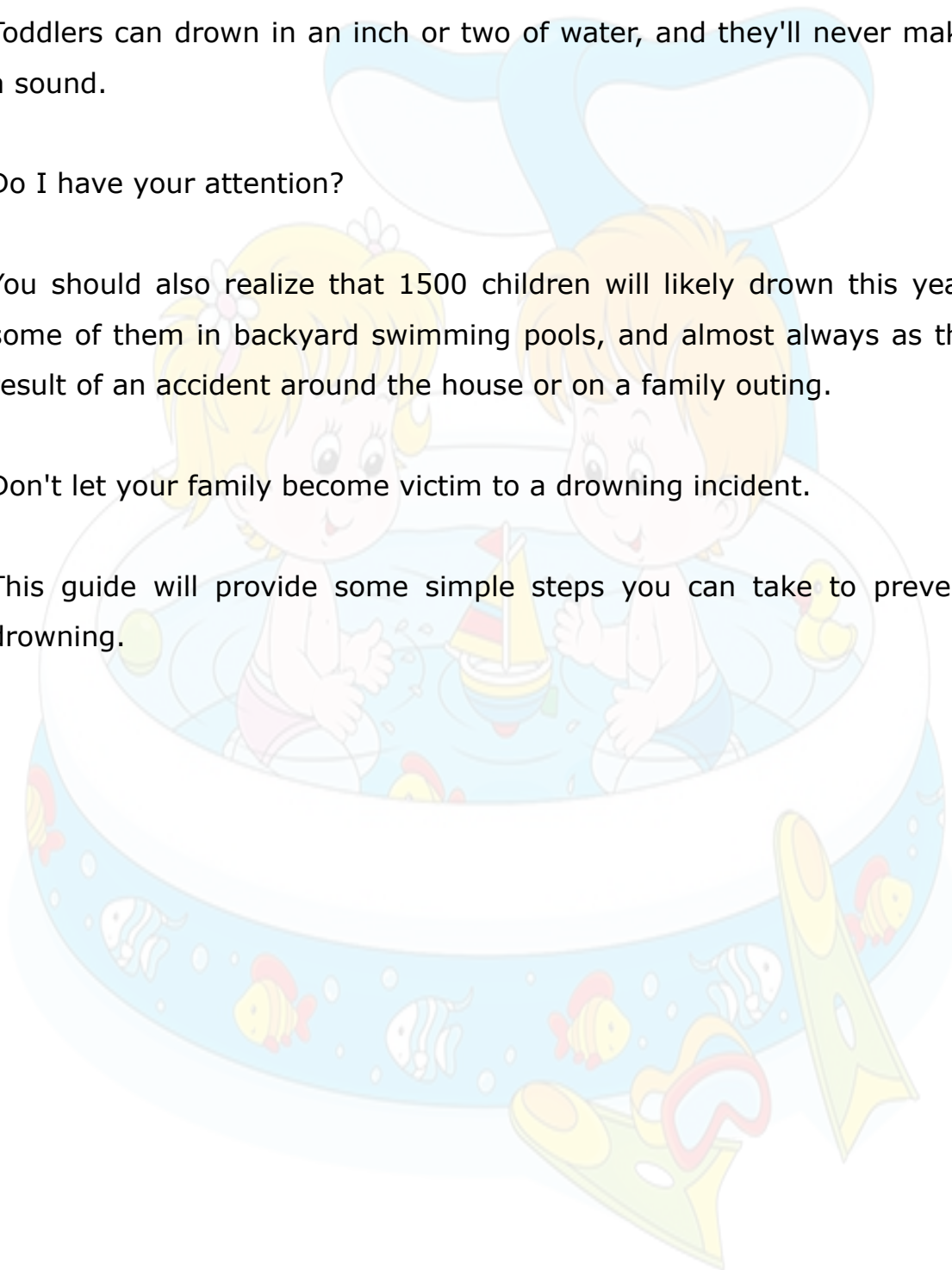
If there is a pool in the back yard, you are technically increasing your risk factor, but your wonderful backyard recreation doesn't need to be removed.

Enforcement of safety rules and barriers make a huge difference.

First and foremost, you need to make a rule and enforce it.

No children in or around the pool unless there is adult supervision.

I know, it sounds a lot like telling a brick wall that it should fall over.

Many times our rules fall on deaf ears because we aren't earnest about enforcing them.

We might let it slip once or twice, that they can jump in while we are "getting ready" to watch them, or we might not tell them to hop out when we run in the house for something.

We find ourselves getting bored watching them play if we aren't with them in the water, and choose to scroll through the Nook or play on the phone while they splash around.

Break these habits. Make a rule and stick to it.

If you are supervising, then your attention should be focused on them, and nothing else.

Remember, if they start drowning, they might not make any noise at all to alert you.

Don't leave a roast in the oven that needs checking.

If you leave for any reason, get them out of the pool.

If you see them near it in the back yard, then they need to be reminded to stay away.

Don't compromise this rule. If you are going to have it, then it needs to be enforced.

Another thing to consider is the use of a pool fence.

It's exactly what it sounds like.

You construct a fence around the pool area to deny access in absence of adult supervision.

The same rules apply as above. If the kids are in the pool, then you are watching.

This also prevents neighbor kids from accessing the pool when you aren't around.

The ones who will break the rules to sneak in when you aren't around are at the highest risk of drowning, because they aren't going to care about being safe either.

A pool fence fulfills the basic strategy of preventing disaster, by separating the components that lead to risky activity, in this case, unsupervised children and water.

Babies and toddlers are at the highest risk of drowning around the house, and as such, it's best not to leave standing water around.

The best defense against drowning is to remove access to any water unless they are drinking it, which should also be under your supervision.

I will never figure out why young children are so fascinated by toilets, or bathrooms in general.

If you have baby gates scattered around the house, it might be a good idea to block off the bathroom as part of your safety plan, the same way you would block off the kitchen to keep them away from sharps and heat.

Yes, that means that you might have to answer every request for access, but in the grand scheme of things, you won't need to worry about them climbing into the toilet.

If they are still in diapers, this obviously isn't going to be as much of an issue.

Once they start learning to use the "big potty," make sure you reinforce that it's a filthy place, and that it's used for business, and nothing else.

Don't leave standing water around. No buckets, no ice chests.

When your child is scooting around the house, they don't have any reason to be around standing water that could hurt them.

Again, this is mainly for babies and toddlers, who are at the highest risk of drowning in the home.

Don't allow them access to any kind of container they can climb or fall into.

The bathtub is another danger area. As they grow, you will need to spend less attention on the bathing process, but always supervise them in the tub until then.

This is a good time to talk to them about water safety, as well as reinforcing how dangerous bath time can actually be.

Warn them about slick floors and falling. Remind them that everything in the bathroom is going to hurt if they hit their head.

Just like with potty training, the bathroom should be a business zone to be taken seriously, not a hang-out when they are out of Mom's view.

The perfect family vacation for most, a trip to the beach carries with it a promise of a perfect day.

Don't let that perfection be spoiled by disaster. Be prepared, have a plan, set ground rules, and most importantly, don't let small children out of your site.

The best way to start a vacation to the beach is to have a plan in place ahead of time.

Before you ever go, while they are getting ramped up and excited about seeing the ocean, you should go over a checklist of safety items with the child.

Brainstorm with the spouse about what kind of hazards they might encounter.

Let them know that they WILL be wearing their sunscreen.

Describe a jellyfish to them and tell them that anything looking like Jello carries a painful sting.

Bug bites are a thing (especially Florida sand gnats), so have repellent in your beach bag. Sand dollars are sharp.

And most importantly, let them know that there will be limits to how far out in the water they can wade.

Don't bother telling them that undertow isn't safe for children. Tell them how dangerous it is for professional divers.

Drowning accidents happen to adults too, especially those who underestimate the strong currents in the ocean.

When I was little, my dad would use himself as a sort of barrier.

I always had to stay between him and the beach, and he was always in the water if I was.

I got a little bored sometimes, and shifted to making sand castles.

I couldn't understand why he was being such a stick in the mud.

But you know what? I understand now, and someday your kids will too.

Make sure they live long enough to resonate.

The rules you set at the house need to be enforced when you actually arrive.

Under no circumstances should a young child be alone in the water, and your eyes should stay fixed on them.

I'm generally not a fan of hovering over a kid to keep them safe, but this is an exception.

Don't let them get away from you, where you won't be able to save them should something happen, and keep your eyes on them while swimming.

The ocean can be fun, but the beach-side can be a very dangerous place for kids.

Call attention to fun things on the beach, like the usual litter from sea organisms, or hermit crabs that might be strolling close to the surf.

Keep it fun, but be extremely protective in this environment.

Remember, even surfers and other experienced ocean goers have their share of mishaps.

Just because it isn't the ocean, doesn't mean it isn't dangerous.

If you are out in a boat, make sure all of the normal safety gear is in place.

Life preservers should be standard equipment, and there's really no reason not to have them.

If you will be swimming, then the same rules that apply at the beach should apply at the lake.

Keep your eyes peeled for danger any time the kids are in the water, and be close enough that you can save them from trouble.

Rivers can actually be as dangerous, if not more so, than the ocean.

When I was about 21 years old, I had the unfortunate experience of standing at the riverfront in St. Louis while a child drowned about 100 meters away.

There were a bunch of kids, possibly 10-14 years old, wondering out into the river on floating logs that had piled up.

One in particular, was the victim for a moment I'll never forget.

I saw him on the logs, looked away for a moment to tell my friend about it, and when I turned around he had vanished.

His friends and family were standing close by, in a panic. One of the logs rolled, and he went right though. Rescue workers were not able to pull him out.

The Mississippi river claimed another victim, because the parents accepted the risk of letting their kid play on some logs. Imagine being in their head at that moment.

They slackened the safety rules once. Don't let that happen to your child. You might have to be the stick in the mud, but they'll be alive.

That story should reinforce that any water; ocean, river, lake, or even small pond; is not the place for children to be left unsupervised.

There is simply too much risk. That kid I mentioned had been strolling on driftwood for a long time, with his parents standing close by.

I can just imagine the firestorm that social media would create if something like that happened today.

If losing their child wasn't bad enough, they would likely be persecuted by the whole of the Internet for allowing it to happen.

The consequences of water are swift and severe.

It doesn't take very long to drown, less than a minute, and while the situation might look safe at a glance, every minute you aren't watching could be the wrong minute to turn your head.

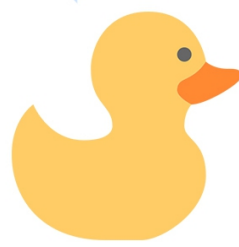That's not to mention boating accidents, or animals in certain environments.

You go to the lake to swim and relax, but don't relax your safety, or that of your kids.

Try to make a list of all the possible dangers you could face, and have a plan in place for each one.

The best way to prevent an accident is to be aware of the risks, and set the rules in a way that minimizes them.

The water is a fun place to visit.

Memories of beaches and pool parties last forever.

Some of the best memories happen around lakes, rivers, the ocean, or even the backyard pool.

Keep those memories happy by preventing disaster.

It's as simple as evaluating the risks, and setting the rules based on your evaluation.

It's about keeping the kids close enough that you can protect them from danger, or save them if something happens.

It means being ever watchful. You can still have fun while exercising caution, so don't let your fun overshadow the safety of your kids.