

# TODDLERS &



# WATER SAFETY

Swimming pools, kiddie pools, ponds and lakes are a great way for kids to keep cool in the hot summer months. But we have to realize that kids need proper supervision and training to ensure these different bodies of water don't pose a drowning hazard. This is particularly true of toddlers. If they are old enough to crawl, they are old enough to get into trouble! You can help reduce the danger to young children by teaching them how to float and tread water so they can protect themselves if they accidentally fall in a lake or pool.

Kidsafe recently discussed this issue with Rob Campbell, an Aquatic Programmer with the city of Edmonton.

Rob has extensive experience working with toddlers and parents. He tells us that "some babies can be taught to float even before they can crawl. They also have naturally good breath control - some will instinctively hold their breath under water. If they get a little water in their mouths, they will automatically swallow it rather than breathing it into their lungs. We usually recommend that parents start bringing their toddlers in for classes at six months of age. At that age, their immune systems have developed to the point where they can cope with the bacteria found in the pool, and they are also less prone to ear infections."

## Floating On Their Backs

Toddlers are taught to surface support and to roll over onto their back so they can float with their mouths above water. Rob points out that “toddlers usually lack the muscle control, coordination and the attention span to actually learn how to swim. But some exhibit natural swimming motions, and their small bodies are naturally quite buoyant, so it’s easy for them to float. If they are lying on their front, however, they don’t usually have the strength or coordination to lift their heads out of the water and breathe - so they have to be taught to roll over on their back.”



It may be a little difficult at first to teach toddlers to float on their back. They spend much of their lives crawling around on all fours, and it’s easy for them to manoeuvre on land when they are lying on their stomachs. When they are lying on their backs in the water, they often feel as helpless as turtles that have been flipped on their back. But they are able to keep their mouths out of water when they are floating this way - and they are able to cry out for help. They may be a little bothered by the sensation of water going into their ears - but that is certainly a better option than water going into their lungs!



With the right training, learning to roll over onto their backs can become quite instinctive for kids. Rob notes that “one of the ways we help youngsters is by putting pictures on the ceiling of the swimming pool. This gives them something to look at, so they are a lot more comfortable in this position.”

## Keeping It Fun

Classes always proceed at a pace that youngsters are comfortable with. Rob notes that “some toddlers may sit in the teach pool for the first three or four lessons before they feel comfortable joining the rest of the class. It’s important not to push the kids too much, but to let them get used to adapting to the water at their own pace.”

It’s not just the water that can be frightening for kids - it’s the whole experience. For many, swimming classes are the first time they’ve ever been in a class setting with a lot of other people around. Or perhaps it’s all the noise in the pool that they find intimidating. Once they’ve gotten used to the experience and feel comfortable, it’s much easier for them to learn.



All of the classes are conducted in an environment where kids are able to have fun and play. The lessons are designed as games the toddlers can take part in, and the different segments are all kept quite short to account for the fact that toddlers have a short attention span. There are lots of songs and lots of opportunities to play to keep it entertaining.

Rob points out that “parents and toddlers are working as a team - so parents have to understand that toddlers are influenced by their reactions and behaviour. If a toddler swallows a little bit of water and the parent looks alarmed and makes a big deal of it, the toddler is also going to make a big deal out of it. But if you don’t panic, they won’t panic.”

## Arms Reach

For years, lifeguards have been telling the parents of young children that *'if you're not within arms reach, you're too far away!'* Rob points out that "we work with toddlers to teach them how to respond in emergency situations - but that doesn't mean they can be left to fend for themselves."

A lot of things can happen in a crowded pool or lake, and toddlers can be knocked over by older kids or adults who are roughhousing. There's also the threat of an abduction by somebody other than their parents. So, to ensure a toddler's safety, make sure YOU ARE ALWAYS WITHIN ARMS REACH.



Don't leave toddlers out of arms reach

## Children and Drownings - The Facts

- \* Drowning is the second-leading cause of unintentional death among Canadian children between the ages of one and four (motor vehicle collisions are #1).
- \* For every toddler (1 to 4 years old) who dies from drowning, there are an estimated 6 to 10 near-drownings which require hospitalization.
- \* One in every five toddlers who experience near-drowning will suffer permanent brain damage.
- \* Forty-six percent of drowning victims aged one to four are alone at the time of drowning. An additional 17 per cent are accompanied only by other kids.
- \* Half of the toddlers drown when their guardian's supervision was distracted.
- \* A toddler can drown in only a few inches of water.
- \* None of the toddlers who died in water-related deaths in 2005 were known to be swimming or playing in the water. About 76% were only playing or walking near water.
- \* Prior to 1995, several infants (0-1 year old) drowned each year in bathtubs, but since 1995 infant bathtub drownings have averaged less than one per year, and none took place in 2005.
- \* Thirty-eight percent of toddler drownings occur in private swimming pools.
- \* Boys are the most frequent victims of drowning (82 per cent).
- \* Drownings occur in less time than it takes to read the above safety messages.