

Learning to Swim Crucial for South Texans

By Mary Reilly-Magee, Owner/Director, Love to Swim School

As South Texans, we love the outdoors and spend a large amount of time in and around water. Making sure your children are confident swimmers is extremely important - not only for their safety and physical development, but to prepare them for the wide range of water sports we all enjoy. I want to encourage all parents to get their children swimming lessons, if not from my company, *Love to Swim School*, then from somewhere else. **No other sport or lesson can save your child's life.**

Over the years, I have heard about many drownings and near drownings. One of them was an 11 year old boy who drowned 2 summers ago. It is always heartbreaking as well as frustrating to hear these tragic stories because they are almost always preventable.

Preventing drowning and near drowning incidents is a central focus of my career. As a member of the United States Swim School Association and the National Drowning Prevention Alliance, I am taking part in a program called Safer 3, a national drowning prevention education program. Here are some drowning statistics you should be aware of:



- Drowning is the 2nd leading cause of accidental death in the U.S. among children ages 14 and under, and the leading cause of accidental death of children age 5 and under. (*American Institute for Preventive Medicine*)
- A child can drown in the time it takes to answer the phone. (*U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission*)
- Of all preschoolers who drown, 70% are in the care of one or both parents at the time of the drowning and 75% are missing from sight for five minutes or less. (*National Center for Injury Prevention & Control*)
- For every child who drowns, four are hospitalized and 16 receive emergency department care for near drowning. (*American Academy of Pediatrics*)
- Of preschooler pool drownings, 65% occur in the child's home pool and 33% at the homes of friends, neighbors or relatives. (*U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission*)

As scary as these statistics are, what really blows me away is **80% of all drownings in Bexar County are male** (*Texas Parks and Wildlife*). This statistic implies that swimming is not a sport boys are enrolled in, or **boys**, because of other sports or lessons, **don't take enough swimming lessons to become skilled swimmers**. Holy cow! Get these boys to the pool and enrolled in lessons! An eleven year old boy should not be a high drowning risk. Baseball, soccer, basketball, etc. can wait or be done in conjunction with swimming year round.

One myth that seems to pervade learning to swim is that a child can take 8 lessons (typically one session) in the summer every year and eventually become a proficient swimmer. **WRONG**. Swimming is a skill sport that takes time and practice to master. Extraordinary progress has been seen in children who participate in swimming lessons once a week year round. This type of schedule provides swimmers with the comfort level and skills that lead to swimming proficiency.

Don't get me wrong. No one is ever drown proof. Stay away from any swimming program that says it can drown proof your child. It can't. However, the American Swimming Coaches Association has determined that anyone who can swim 300 yards of freestyle continuously has dramatically lowered the likelihood of ever drowning. Please consider investing in your child's safety and future by giving them the swimming foundation they need.