



Drowning Prevention

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Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) play a powerful role in water safety and drowning prevention.

What is Drowning?

Drowning is a form of death by suffocation. Death occurs after the lungs take in water. This water intake then interferes with breathing. When the lungs become heavy, oxygen stops being delivered to the heart. Without the supply of oxygen, the body shuts down.

Who is at an Increased Risk of Drowning?

- Young children.
- People with epilepsy or other medical conditions.
- People who are drawn to or fascinated with water and may not understand the dangers.
- People who cannot swim.
- People with mobility challenges or poor muscle control.



Understanding Drowning Hazards

Any source of water is a potential drowning hazard. This includes pools, rivers, lakes, hot tubs, bathtubs, and other bodies of water.

It is important that you know about a person's ability to safely navigate different environments, the risks, and what supports the person needs to be safe.



Listen to these parents tell how drowning impacted their families

Drowning Deaths

- One afternoon, a 19-year-old man with controlled seizures, who often relaxed in the tub for hours, had a seizure. Within a matter of minutes, he was found underwater by his long-time and caring staff. He could not be saved.
- A three-year-old boy left his family home. Within minutes, his parents were searching for him and found him dead in the neighbor's pool.
- A 58-year-old man went into the bathroom, got into a walk-in tub, and turned on the water. He was later found submerged by staff. Despite administering CPR, he died.

Fast Facts:

- Eight Ohioans with IDD died of drowning last year.
- Sixty-three percent of those who drown in 2020 were younger than five years old.
- Of those, 75 percent were males and 25 percent were females, while 88 percent lived with their families.
- Bathtub drowning resulted in 25 percent of all drowning deaths in 2020.
- According to the CDC, drownings are a leading cause of injury or death for young children ages one to 14. Three children die every day because of drowning.
- Drowning is fast and silent. It can happen in as little as 20-60 seconds. Drowning does not always look like we would expect.
- Some studies indicate that a person can drown in one milliliter of fluid for every kilogram they weigh. So, a person weighing around 140 pounds (63.5 kg) could drown after inhaling only a quarter cup of water.
- A large number of drownings occur in the summer.



Outdoor Water Safety

By providing the right supports and supervision, you can help someone enjoy the great outdoors. Swimming, boating, and other outdoor activities can be a lot of fun when planned. By knowing the environment, the person, their needs, and the environment, you can create a great experience.

Environmental Considerations

- Identify possible drowning hazards such as ponds, pools, reservoirs, and rivers.
- Ensure that safety mechanisms are in place including locks, fencing, and other measures to secure water hazards.
- Be sure to address environmental risks with caregivers, neighbors, and during the person's service plan meeting.

Prevention

- Enroll the person in swimming lessons. Learning to swim can save a life.
- Never leave someone with mobility challenges alone near a body of water.
- Participate in water safety, first aid, and CPR courses.
- Always have a child wear a life jacket when on a boat, raft, dock, close to water, or in the water.
- Stay far back from the water's edge to avoid accidentally falling in.
- Provide constant supervision and remain within arm's reach. Always have someone in the water with the person, even if a lifeguard is on duty.
- Provide 1:1 supervision for individuals with a seizure disorder when near water.
- Have a cell phone near in case of emergency.

Responding to a Water Emergency

- If someone is missing, check the water first.
- Only enter the water if you have strong swimming skills and it is safe to do so. It is better to use a rope or other object to pull a person to shore.
- Call 911 and call out for help.
- If the person has stopped breathing, follow your CPR/First Aid training once they are safe onshore.
- Assist the person to seek medical attention if they seem okay, as there could be complications that are not visible right away.



Bathtub Safety

- You can take simple steps to make sure people are safe in their homes. It starts with planning and providing the right supports (bathing equipment, supervision, etc.).

Walk-in Tubs

DODD has identified incidents of drowning directly related to "walk-in" tubs. The use of walk-in tubs could place individuals at risk in terms of scalding, inability to open the inner tub door in an emergency if water-filled, slipping under the water either from the "seat", or slipping on the inner tub floor. Most walk-in tubs have high walls, mostly narrow doorways, and inward opening doorways. These features may be a concern at times of any medical incident or fall inside the tub. The features make it difficult for the family members to open the door and get the person inside the tub out for emergency medical help. People who are prone to seizures, lack upper body strength, have mobility issues, or are unable to verbalize are often at greater risk when using this particular tub. One study shows a standard bathtub has a max depth of 13-14 inches whereas walk-in bathtubs can have nearly 40-48 inches of water depth (that can be as much as 80 gallons of water). Seats are placed 17 inches above, leaving nearly almost 20 inches of depth to immerse yourself in water.

Prevention

- At-risk children or adults should never be left unattended in the bathtub for any reason.
- If an individual has a seizure disorder, provide 1:1 supervision around any water source.
- Get all of your supplies (i.e., towels, clothing, hygiene products, etc.) ready before entering the bathroom.
- Provide the necessary supports.
- Do not run to answer the phone or check the door.
- Never leave siblings or unfamiliar caretakers to watch people while bathing.
- Do not rely on bathtub seats or rings. They create a false sense of security.