Water Safety Workshop for Parents and Caregivers

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A free 60-minute water safety workshop for parents of young children: home hazards, Water Watchers, pools, swim lessons and the first minutes.

Adults · 60 minutes · For parents, caregivers

This plan lets anyone run a **one-hour water safety workshop for parents and caregivers of young children**, at a school, library, clinic, place of worship or community center. Families leave knowing where young children drown, how to be a real Water Watcher, when to start swim lessons and what to do first in an emergency, with a checklist and three changes to make that week.

No. 1

cause of death for U.S. children ages 1-4 is drowning. More children that age die from drowning than from any other cause (CDC, 2024).

Source: cdc.gov https://www.cdc.gov/drowning/data-research/facts/index.html

Learning objectives

- Explain why young children drown at home and during non-swim time, and name the layers of protection that prevent it.
- Find and fix at least three water hazards in their own home.
- Practice being a Water Watcher, including touch supervision and a clean handoff.
- Know when swim lessons can start and why lessons don't replace supervision or life jackets.
- Know what to do first in a water emergency and where to learn CPR with rescue breaths.

Materials

- ☐ Projector or a printed copy of the key facts (in the Background section)
- ☐ One Home Water Safety Checklist, Water Watcher card and Emergency Action Plan per family
- ☐ A U.S. Coast Guard-approved child life jacket and a pair of water wings, for show and tell
- ☐ Pens, name tags (first names only), and a sheet listing local swim lesson and CPR options you looked up in advance
- ☐ If your group speaks another language, a bilingual co-presenter

Lesson steps

1 Welcome and why it matters — 10 minutes

Introduce yourself and the goal: *Leave tonight with three changes you can make at home this week.* Share the CDC fact that drowning is the leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 4, then turn straight to what works: layers of protection. Draw five layers on the board: barriers and alarms, supervision, swimming skills, life jackets, and emergency preparation.

2 Activity 1: Room-by-room hazard hunt 15 minutes

Pairs walk through their own home in their heads using the Home Water Safety Checklist. Each pair circles three hazards and writes the fix next to each. Share a few out loud.

- Bathroom: a baby is never alone in the tub, even for a moment; toilet lid locks; the bathroom door stays latched.
- Kitchen, laundry and yard: buckets, coolers, kiddie pools and rain-filled bins are emptied and turned over right after use.
- Doors to water: locks and alarms out of a child's reach on any door that leads to a pool, pond or yard with water.
- Pools and hot tubs: a four-sided fence with a self-closing, self-latching gate; a locked cover on the hot tub; no floating cover that a child could slip under.

3 Activity 2: Be the Water Watcher 10 minutes

Ask a volunteer to watch a 'pool' (a spot on the floor) while you try to distract them with a phone, a question and a plate of food. Then hand them a Water Watcher card and practice a clean handoff: *I'm handing you the card. You're watching the water until 3:20.*

- For babies, toddlers and weak swimmers: touch supervision, an adult who can swim within arm's reach.
- For everyone else: one named Water Watcher whose only job is watching, with no phone, no cooking and no alcohol.
- Swap watchers every 15 to 20 minutes by passing the card.
- Lifeguard on duty? Keep watching anyway.

4 Activity 3: Swim lessons and life jackets 10 minutes

Show the life jacket and the water wings. Ask: *Which one is a safety device?* Then cover swim lessons.

- Water wings, floaties and inflatable toys can deflate and don't prevent drowning. A properly fitted Coast Guard-approved life jacket is the safety device.
- The AAP says swim lessons can start for many children at age 1, depending on readiness, and does not recommend infant swim programs under age 1.
- Lessons lower risk but don't make a child 'drown proof'; supervision and barriers still matter.
- Hand out the local swim lesson options you found and the Swim Lesson Questions sheet.

5 Activity 4: Your emergency plan 10 minutes

Families start the Emergency Action Plan together. Walk through the first moves.

- If a child is missing, check the water first. Seconds count.
- Shout for help and call 911 (or have someone else call).
- Help without going in: reach with a pole or throw something that floats.
- Learn CPR with rescue breaths from a certified course. Drowning is a breathing emergency. Hand out the CPR class options you found.

6 Assessment: Three changes 5 minutes

Each person writes three changes they'll make this week on the back of their checklist and keeps it. Ask for a show of hands: *Who found a hazard tonight they hadn't thought of?* Use the quick check questions below if time allows.

7 Take-home

Each family leaves with the Home Water Safety Checklist, a Water Watcher card, the Emergency Action Plan and the Swim Lesson Questions sheet, plus a link to make a family water safety plan online.

Background for the facilitator

You don't need to be an expert. Stick to these facts and send people to the sources and guides for more.

- **Young children drown at home, often when nobody planned to swim.** The AAP reports that 69% of drownings in children age 4 and younger happened during non-swim times. The CPSC says nearly 90 children drown inside the home every year, two-thirds of them in the bathtub, and a child can drown in as little as 2 inches of water. More in water hazards at home.
- **Bath rules.** The AAP recommends that children not bathe alone until they are at least 6, and that young siblings not supervise them.
- **Fences work.** CDC says a four-sided isolation fence that separates the pool from the house and yard cuts a child's drowning risk by 83% compared with three-sided property-line fencing. The AAP's specs: at least 4 feet high, no gaps over 4 inches, and a self-closing, self-latching gate with the latch at least 54 inches up. See pool fences and gates.
- **Water Watchers.** Pool Safely says the Water Watcher's supervising should be their only task, even when a lifeguard is present. The AAP suggests passing a Water Watcher card every 15-20 minutes, and touch supervision (an adult who can swim within arm's length) for infants, toddlers and weak swimmers.
- **Missing child?** The CPSC found that most children who drowned in pools or spas had been missing for 5 minutes or less. The Red Cross says: if a child is missing, check the water first.
- **Swim lessons.** Lessons can begin for many children at age 1, depending on readiness, but they don't make kids "drown proof." See what age to start swim lessons.
- **CPR.** The 2024 AHA and AAP guidelines say resuscitation after drowning must focus on restoring breathing as much as circulation. Point people to a certified course; don't teach CPR steps yourself unless you are a certified instructor.

Quick check questions

Ask these out loud at the end. Answers in brackets.

1. When do most young children drown? [When nobody expected them to be near water: non-swim time.]
2. How long can a baby be left alone in the bath? [Never, not even for a moment.]
3. What's the Water Watcher's only job? [Watching the water. No phone, no cooking, no drinks.]
4. Are water wings a safety device? [No. Use a Coast Guard-approved life jacket.]
5. A child is missing at a party. Where do you look first? [The water: pool, hot tub, pond, bathtub.]

Running the session well

- **Keep it hopeful.** Every fact gets a fix. Don't tell drowning stories or show rescue videos.

- **Expect grief in the room.** Some parents may have lost a child or a relative to drowning. Never suggest blame. If someone shares a loss, thank them and offer the Grief Support Contacts sheet privately.
- **Meet people where they are.** Some parents don't swim; about 40 million U.S. adults say they don't know how to swim. Mention adult lessons without singling anyone out: Adult Learn-to-Swim Orientation.
- **Language access.** The American Red Cross offers a free online Water Safety for Parents and Caregivers course in English, Spanish and Haitian Creole that families can take afterward.
- **Collect nothing.** You don't need sign-in sheets or contact details to run this workshop.

Take-home sheet

Printable: Home Water Safety Checklist resource.aminfoundation.io/printables/home-water-safety-checklist

Printable: Water Watcher Card resource.aminfoundation.io/printables/water-watcher-card

Printable: Water Emergency Action Plan resource.aminfoundation.io/printables/emergency-action-plan

Families can also build a plan on their phone with Family water safety plan and check their home with Home water hazard audit.

What you can do today

Book a room for one hour, look up two local swim lesson programs and one CPR class to hand out, and print the take-home sheets. For more background, read how to supervise kids around water.

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