



# STAY ON TOP OF IT

## Myths and Facts about Water Safety

If a genie popped out of a magic lamp and offered to protect your children from a leading cause of injury-related death, what would you say?

- a) Nah, it's too much trouble.
- b) I always watch my children, so nothing will go wrong.
- c) My parents didn't worry about this stuff, and I survived.
- d) Sure, genie, you're on.

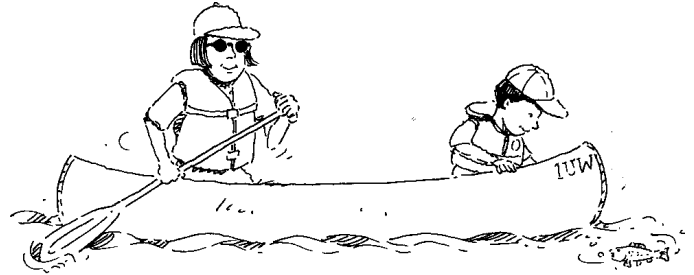
The correct answer, of course, is "d." But it's parents, not genies, who can protect children from drowning.

Drowning prevention has three parts: 1) precautions, 2) supervision, and 3) consistent use of life vests, also known as life jackets or personal flotation devices (PFDs). It's as simple as one-two-three, yet drowning continues to claim lives. Why? In part, water safety experts suspect that we're distracted or deceived by myths about water safety.

Myths give us a false sense of safety, and allow our kids to be 'set up' for danger. Here are some common misconceptions:

### Myth #1: Drowning is noisy. I'll hear my child splashing and struggling in time to help.

Maybe in the movies, but not in real life. This myth really endangers young children. They don't have the ability to figure out what to do, such as right themselves or stand up, even in a few inches of water. As a result, they just "slip away" in silence.



Toddlers and preschoolers need constant adult supervision and life vests that fit each time they play near or in the water or on a dock.

Most drownings happen during a brief lapse in supervision, when a parent becomes distracted or involved in some other activity. A life vest is no substitute for supervision, but it can buy time.

### Myth #2: I don't live or vacation near the water, so I don't need to worry.

There are water hazards in and around every home. Toddlers have drowned in five-gallon buckets, garden ponds and toilet bowls. Keep young children out of the bathroom except when directly supervised and don't leave buckets or barrels where they can gather water. Children can drown in just a few inches of liquid.

Stay in the bathroom with young children each minute they are in the bathtub. Remember Myth #1 and don't leave the room thinking that splashing noises or a slightly older sibling will alert you to trouble. A baby's or toddler's bath can be a life or death situation, and should be entrusted only to adults.

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## Myth #3: Once children learn to swim, they don't need life vests.

At swimming pools and supervised swimming areas, an older child who swims well may not need to wear a life vest. That's where judgment comes in. Many public or resort pools have swimming tests, but often it's up to you. Children need to be really good swimmers.

Around steep banks, rivers or docks, where the water is swift, dark and cold, the drowning risk increases and rescue becomes much harder. With those factors working against us, we need to use more caution.

When boating, rafting or inner-tubing, or while swimming in open water like a lake or a river, adults and children should always wear properly fitted life vests. Water conditions change, boats capsize, and cold water makes life-saving and swimming skills difficult. Life vests improve chances of survival and rescue. But they only work if they are worn. You need to wear life vests, too, so you are prepared to help a child or yourself.

## Myth #4: Kids won't wear life vests.

They'll wear them if the expectation is clear and consistent. It helps to start young. Make life vests a part of all water activities, just like bringing sunscreen if you're going to be in the sun. Coast Guard-approved life vests come in many shapes, sizes and colors. Let your children pick their favorite, as long as it's the right size and type for what you need. As children grow older, keep insisting on life vest use. Check their life vests each year for fit, wear and tear, and style.

## Myth #5: Alcohol improves a good time on the water.

This myth has been created by alcohol advertising. Drinking affects judgment and motor skills in a boat or by a pool just as it does in a car. It slows reactions, making adults and teens victims of silent drowning. It can also increase the risk of hypothermia or cardiac arrest. When boating, a no-alcohol rule is important for both the driver and the passengers.

## Myth #6: I've taken life-saving and CPR, so I can rescue my child.

CPR and life-saving don't replace adult supervision, life vests, swimming skills and water safety awareness. It only takes five minutes under water to have brain damage, a cardiac arrest, or even to die.

### FACT:

**Prevention is the only "cure" for drowning, and it's within every parent's grasp.**

### For More Information

- Talk with your health care provider
- Visit the Washington State Drowning Prevention Network Web site: [www.seattlechildrens.org/dp](http://www.seattlechildrens.org/dp)