

CHILD CARE RESOURCE & REFERRAL

Advocating for the well-being of children in child care.

Position Statement 5/2003

Water safety

Splashing and splashing – there's nothing quite like playing in the water. Whether the play is in a pool with your whole body, or in a water table with your hands, the way water feels and moves can't be duplicated. Water is a wonderful and fun learning experience for children, and can also be very calming for some children. Water play fosters learning in all developmental areas. Children are learning pre-science concepts when they learn how things move differently in water. When children fill and dump containers, they are learning how some containers overflow, but others don't, these are pre-math skills. When different toys are added to the water, it expands the child's opportunity to learn. If washcloths and dolls are added to water play, children not only learn social skills, but the physical skill of squeezing out the washcloth. If containers and scoops are added, children learn hand-eye coordination and what makes the containers sink or float. There are many ways to initiate water play for children: water tables, Rubbermaid containers, a small wading pool, paint brushes with water, or even going swimming at a local swimming pool. Review the licensing rules to be sure you are in compliance. Offer indoor and outdoor water play often. Having "water day" once a week doesn't present children enough exploratory opportunities. Water play offers so many fun ways to learn- children can't help but splish and splash!

Keep Children Safe Around Water

Water hazards include swimming pools, beaches, rivers, ditches, buckets, pails, water tables, hot tubs, water balloons, sinks and toilets. Child drowning is a silent death – there is no splashing or cry for help to alert anyone of danger. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission states that 75% of submerged drowning victims are between the ages of 1 and 3 years. 69% of children were not expected to be at or in the pool. 77% were missing from sight for less than 5 minutes. During any swimming/wading activity, lower adult to child ratios are recommended. Caring for Our Children, the National Health and Safety Performance Standards recommend the following ratios for swimming and wading activities:

Developmental Levels	Child:Staff Ratio
Infants	1:1
Toddlers	1:1
Preschoolers	4:1
School Age Children	6:1

These ratios do not include people who have other duties that might prevent their involvement in supervision during water activities. A lifeguard should not be counted in the child/adult ratio unless s/he is assigned only to the children in that group.

Health and Safety Factors

- ▼ If portable wading pools are used, fill them only prior to use, and drain it and put it away as soon as children leave the pool.
- ▼ Children not yet potty-trained must wear water-proof disposable diapers (such as "Swimmers"), designed for pool use. Children with diarrhea should be excluded from pool use.
- ▼ Portable wading pools should be sanitized with bleach water after each use and left empty until next use. (Use a solution of ¼ cup bleach to 1 gallon of water)
- ▼ Drinking water from a pool is not recommended due to the risk of disease.
- ▼ Water temperature should be maintained between 82 to 88 degrees Fahrenheit.
- ▼ Hot tubs, spas and saunas are not safe for children – they easily overheat or dehydrate.
- ▼ Children should wash their hands before and after water play.
- ▼ Water balloons should be avoided around infants and toddlers – a broken balloon is a choking hazard.
- ▼ Surfaces surrounding water become wet and can be a hazard – teach children the rules of safety.

Be Prepared:

Children move fast, are curious, and don't understand their physical abilities. A child care provider should be overly prepared when facilitating water play activities with children.

- ▼ Anticipate everything you may need and have it within hand's reach – cordless/cell phone, towels, Kleenex, toys, first aid kit, sunscreen, drinks, etc.
- ▼ If you need to retrieve something, bring all of the children along with you. No child of any age should be left alone near water, no matter how shallow.
- ▼ Caregivers need to remain alert while supervising water activities – avoid reading, playing cards, sun bathing, phone conversations or napping.
- ▼ When infants or toddlers are around water, an adult should always be within arm's length, able to provide "touch supervision".
- ▼ Sprinklers are safer than wading pools and there is less potential to spread disease.
- ▼ Flotation devices are not a substitute for constant supervision. They can give children a false sense of confidence and the caregiver a false sense of safety.
- ▼ Ask for volunteers to help on days that you will have water play, especially when going to a pool or lake. (Some parents would love the opportunity to view their child in the child care setting)
- ▼ All caregivers should be trained in First Aid and CPR and know procedures to get emergency help.

Tips:

- ▼ Have parents complete a yearly permission slip for the application of sunscreen and insect repellent.
- ▼ Apply sunscreen, and insect repellent if needed before going outdoors. (Insect repellent is not recommended for infants under 2 months of age. Sunscreen is not recommended for infants under 6 months of age).
- ▼ Sunhats for infants and toddlers can be helpful.
- ▼ Always inform parents when kids will be swimming. Be sure to communicate with parents a few days ahead if they need to bring special items (ex., swimsuits, towels, earplugs).
- ▼ Have extra suits and towels so every child can participate, or ask parents to leave extras at the child care setting.
- ▼ Each child and caregiver should have an extra change of clothes.
- ▼ Take time to use the bathroom before going out to play.
- ▼ Feed the children a snack before going outdoors.
- ▼ Bring lots of cold water and cups outdoors.
- ▼ Place wading pools and water tables in shaded areas if possible.

Liability recommendations:

Parents expect, and pay for, quality and safety when entrusting their children to others. A serious accident to a child could damage a child care program's reputation and relationships with parents and children could suffer. Following the recommendations printed on this page will help keep the children in your care safe, but accidents do still happen! Be prepared and exercise extreme caution when the children in your care are near water.

*Make sure your liability insurance coverage covers the use of swimming pools – on premise and off premise.

*If you do not have liability insurance, seriously consider getting it! Call CCR&R for liability insurance information.

*Written permission from parents should be obtained prior to taking children off premise to a pool.

References:

Caring for Our Children, National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-Home Child Care Programs, 2nd Edition, 2002
Healthy Young Children: A Manual for Programs, 4th Edition, 2002
<http://nrc.uchsc.edu/states.html>



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