

## Preventing Drowning Accidents

Unfortunately, drowning and near-drowning accidents occur every day. Such accidents are usually a result of mistakes or failures to take basic safety precautions. All too often, the underlying cause is associated with the failure to provide needed supervision to someone who is vulnerable. This includes children and adults who are not able to swim or otherwise protect themselves from the hazards associated with water. While drowning accidents are often associated with bodies of water like a pool or lake, many of these accidents occur inside homes.

It is essential to recognize that a person can drown in just a few minutes, and without making a sound. Service providers must always take precautions to make sure that consumers are protected from this tragedy. Below are basic strategies that staff should follow whenever a consumer is in or around water.

### Prevention Strategies during Bathing Activities

When routinely assisting consumers with bathing, service providers must:

- **Know the level of supervision and support that each consumer needs to remain safe.** These supports will vary depending upon the needs and circumstances of each consumer. Some consumers require more supports than others. There should be a clear plan about the amount of supervision and assistance a person needs while bathing. Consumers who need assistance from staff while bathing must never be left alone in a bathtub, even for a second.
- **Make specific staff assignments.** Staff responsibilities for supervising and assisting consumers should be specific to avoid any confusion and mistakes about who is performing a particular activity. Staff assigned to assist a consumer during bathing should never make an assumption that someone else will take over these duties. For example, it would be a serious mistake for a staff person to assume that he or she was relieved of their supervision responsibility just because other staff were near the bathroom.
- **Eliminate distractions and interruptions that interfere with supervision responsibilities.** For consumers who need staff supervision and support during bathing, make sure that bathing activities occur at those times that maximize staff resources. For example, avoid scheduling bathing activities during other peak activity times like meal times or at times that staff members take breaks.
- **Take special precautions with consumers who have seizure conditions.** Consumers with seizure conditions must never be left alone in a bathtub. Hot baths may lower a persons threshold for seizures. Because a person can lose consciousness during a seizure, a staff member must be prepared to take immediate action. Appropriate provisions for privacy should always be maintained consistent with a persons support needs.
- **Avoid the mistake of thinking that nothing bad can happen in a minute or two it can and does.** For example, suppose you are assisting a consumer with his or her bath and the phone (or doorbell) rings. Don't leave the person unattended in the bathtub to go answer the phone. Instead, let the phone continue to ring or let someone else answer.
- **Drain the bathtub right away.** Never allow standing water to remain in a bathtub.

## **Prevention Strategies during Water Recreation Activities**

While enjoying activities at a pool, beach, lake or river, service providers should

- **Know each consumer's swimming abilities.** The swimming abilities of each consumer should be considered beforehand to make sure there is sufficient staff consistent with each consumers swimming skills and support needs. A consumer should never be left alone in the water, regardless of swimming abilities.
- **Make specific staff assignments.** Staff should be assigned responsibility for supervising a specific consumer or consumers as appropriate. Duties of staff at the waterfront and in the water must be explicit. Staff must clearly understand how they are to supervise such as remaining within arms length or maintaining visual contact.
- **Take special precautions with consumers who have seizure conditions.** A staff person should be assigned one-on-one to supervise a consumer with a seizure condition and should be in the water with the person at all times.
- **Make sure floatation devices and life saving vests are properly used.** These devices should be properly sized and worn by non-swimmers. These devices can give a false sense of security their use is never a substitute for staff supervision. Inflatable inner tubes, water wings, and noodles should never be considered safety devices.
- **Only allow swimming in designated areas of lakes, rivers, and oceans; obey all rules and posted signs.**
- **Have a cellular phone available so assistance can be quickly obtained in emergencies.** Seconds count when it comes to water emergencies. Having a means to quickly summon assistance can make a significant difference.
- **Know CPR and basic life saving techniques.**
- **Know the weather conditions and location of underwater hazards before entering the water.**