

# R.E.S.P.E.C.T. THE WATER

By AOAP



*summer fun 2025!*

# Why should we R.E.S.P.E.C.T. the water?

The Association of Aquatic Professionals (AOAP) is a professional organization supporting professionals who operate and maintain local swimming pools, water parks, swim schools, waterfronts and more. Among our priorities is **drowning prevention** – something our members are passionate about and strive for daily.

Drowning is a leading cause of death around the world, and drowning rates are actually increasing after years of decline. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), about ten people die every day from unintentional drowning – two of these are children age 14 or younger. They also note:

- Drowning is the leading cause of death due to unintentional injury in children aged one to four;
- Fatal drowning remains the second-leading cause of unintentional injury-related death (behind motor vehicle crashes) for children between one and 14;
- Of all ages, drowning ranks fifth among the leading causes of unintentional injury death in the United States;
- And for minorities – specifically within Black communities – the drowning rate for children ages five to 14 is almost three times that of white children in the same age range.

But we also know that **drowning is preventable!** By educating yourself and your family about safety around the water and building layers of protection, you can help reduce fatal drownings and keep your loved ones safe.

Read on to learn more about how to **R.E.S.P.E.C.T the Water** with AOAP's drowning prevention campaign.

# IT'S AS SIMPLE AS **R.E.S.P.E.C.T.**

## **R**ecognition

Recognize the signs of non-swimmers, tired and distressed swimming & potentially unsafe situations

## **E**ducation

Learn what factors can lead to drowning

## **S**upervision

Direct, constant supervision is key

## **P**hysical Barriers

Provide fencing, safety covers, alarms and life jackets

## **E**xpectations

Understand what to expect from the aquatic environment and your body's response, and know your limits

## **C**ommunication

Warn and inform family, friends and guests about the dangers present in and around the water

## **T**raining

Learn to swim and how to respond to emergencies

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# Recognition

Recognize the signs of non-swimmers, tired and distressed swimming & potentially unsafe situations

Victims don't go to "drowning school"!

Although there are some common drowning indicators, anyone can drown if the situation is right. Recognizing not only drowning behaviors, but the factors that can lead to drowning is just as important.

### ***Recognizing Non-Swimmers***

People that can't swim or are weak swimmers can still enjoy the water! Learning to recognize these swimmers so you can provide a life jacket and identify boundaries for their swimming activity is important. Ask parents or participants about their swimming ability before you get to the water and continuously monitoring can help prevent drowning accidents.

Some non-swimmer behaviors include:

- Looking scared to get in the water
- Hanging out in the shallow end
- Hanging on to the side of the wall (death grip)
- Crawling along the pool wall rather than swimming
- Not getting their face or hair wet

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### ***Recognizing Tired Swimmers***

A tired swimmer can get into trouble quickly, and they should be easy to spot since you've been actively supervising your swimmers. If you see someone is getting tired, ask the swimmer to rest or help them to side of the pool. And don't be afraid to take a break yourself if you are getting tired!

Some behaviors of tired swimmers may include:

- Not moving forward
- Dragging their arms
- Looking tired
- Having hair in their face
- Calling for help

### ***Recognizing Active Drowning***

Remember, drowning victims don't all look the same! Generally, looking for unusual swimming behaviors, excessive splashing, or no response when you try to get their attention should prompt an immediate response to prevent a fatal incident.

Some drowning behaviors may include:

- A head tilted back looking up
- Vertical body with no kicking
- Arms reaching to the side or the front – often times like they are trying to crawl out of the water
- Loss of motion
- Scared eyes

And remember that there may or may not be splashing, and ***they cannot call for help!***

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***If you see a drowning victim, do not swim out to rescue them*** – you could also become a victim!

- Call for help and / or alert a lifeguard or whoever is supervising the water.
- Reach or throw – don't go! Use a rescue tube, ring buoy, inflatable raft, pool noodle or other equipment to assist from a safe distance. Keep your weight on your heels or lay down on the edge of the water so that they don't pull you in.

If you don't respond quickly, an active drowning victim can become submerged in as little as 20 seconds!

### ***Recognizing Submerged Victims***

Once a swimmer becomes submerged, it's very difficult to see them – even if you're swimming right over them. Indications that someone is on the bottom of the pool includes color variation (like a smudge) that doesn't move, and small bubbles may appear at the surface of the water. If you have any question about something you see below the surface, take action!

Action might include:

- Call for help – a submerged swimmer will need additional care from professional responders.
- Only try to remove them from the water if you can swim or navigate to them safely.
- If a reaching pool or hook is available, you can attempt to move them to the side of the pool.
- If the water is too deep or dangerous, watch the submerged item until emergency response personnel arrive.

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## R.E.S.P.E.C.T. the Water



Learn what factors can lead to drowning

### ***Water Safety Education***

Water safety education for children and adults is a critical component in helping prevent drownings. In addition to the R.E.S.P.E.C.T the Water campaign, there are a number of programs available to help parents and caregivers learn about water safety. Reach out to your local parks and recreation department, aquatic facility or any of the national learn-to-swim organizations to request more information.

### ***Things to Know Before You Get in the Water***

There are a variety of things that can impact your safety in the water and lead to potential drowning. Some of the things you may consider before getting into the water include:

- Air and water temperature (very hot and very cold): How will your body react in and out of the water?
- Water clarity: Can you see the bottom of the pool? Are there hidden obstacles under the surface of a lake or pond?
- Wind conditions can affect how well you can see swimmers in the water.
- Swift currents can easily pull a swimmer further from shore or out of their comfort zone.
- Water clarity
- Pool repair (broken drains, skimmers)

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- Obvious pool repair issues such as broken drains or skimmers can pose immediate risk.
- Knowing water depths can help define boundaries for swimmers of different abilities.
- Be aware of signage such as pool rules or caution flags.
- Know basic emergency procedures including placement of lifeguards and rescue equipment, how to access a phone on site or if there is an AED on site.

### ***Potentially Dangerous Activities While Swimming***

Just like being educated about the water before swimming, it's important to be aware of activities that may be dangerous while swimming.

- Breath holding games
- Rough housing
- Diving into shallow water or in areas where you don't know the depth
- Not drinking enough water

While these may be common occurrences, they can lead to drowning or serious injury. And even strong swimmers can get into trouble in these instances.

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# Supervision

Direct, constant supervision is key

Supervision can help prevent a variety of emergencies. While you may swim with lifeguards present, it's important to understand that they are there to give safety reminders and respond to emergencies; they are a back-up and not a substitution for direct, constant supervision by parents or caregivers.

### ***Effective Supervision***

Simply being present near the water is not enough. How can you provide effective supervision?

- Make sure all supervisors are aware of potential safety hazards both in and out of the water including knowing swimmer abilities and defining boundaries for all swimmers.
- Assign a **Water Watcher** who is solely responsible for supervising without distractions like phones, books or other activities.
- Share supervision with other parents or caregivers. Supervision can be tiring, so having a plan to share responsibilities can make it both safer and easier.
- If you have non-swimmers in your group, a parent or caregiver should stay within arms reach of them at all times.



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# Physical Barriers

Provide fencing, safety covers, alarms, and life jackets

There are many types of physical barriers that that can be used around the pool. There are many physical barriers that may be required by law such as fences and locking pool gates, but there are additional barriers not required that may help prevent a drowning situation such as pool covers, window and door alarms, or even alarms that can be worn on the body that will alert you if it gets wet or if the device has been submerged for too long.

**Life jackets** are another type of physical barrier. Utilize them for non-swimmers, and familiarize yourself with local laws when boating regarding who should wear a jacket and how many should be on board. Be sure that you're using a US Coast Guard Approved jacket, and learn to appropriately fit and secure a life jacket.

**Remember, physical barriers are not a replacement for direct, constant supervision.** They are, instead, another layer of protection!

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# Expectations

Understand what to expect from the aquatic environment and your body's response, and know your limits

### ***Set Expectations for Non-Swimmer Behavior Before You Get to the Water***

Making sure all swimmers understand what to expect when going to swim and what behaviors are appropriate will help ensure their safety.

- Only swim with a lifeguard or responsible adult present to supervise you, and never swim alone.
- Stay within eyesight and arm's reach of a responsible adult.
- Follow the facility rules.
- Non-swimmers should not go into water that is more than chest deep and should wear a life jacket while swimming.
- Take a break when you're tired.

### ***Know Everyone's Swimming Ability - Including Your Own***

Knowing your swimming ability as well as the ability of those you're supervising is a key component to staying safe. From understanding how your body will react in a pool versus at a beach with waves or in water with a current is critical to knowing what to expect when going off a diving board or down a slide will help swimmers make good choices. Knowing when to take breaks and drink water also helps keep everyone safe.

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Warn and inform family, friends and guests about the dangers present in and around the water

Communicating your expectations clearly before you get to the water as well as during your time there will help keep everyone safe.

- Communicate expectations with everyone in your party – kids and adults.
- Keep in mind that kids will be excited when they arrive, so communicating before you arrive might be helpful!
- Check for communication about water conditions or facility rules when you arrive on site, and share the information with everyone in your party.
- Go over water safety rules and swimming boundaries.
- Identify meeting spots in the event of emergencies.
- While supervising, make sure that everyone in your group is following facility rules, listening to directions from lifeguards or water safety staff, and staying away from hazards.

Communication can be a powerful tool for keeping us all safe in, on and around the water!

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## Learn to swim and how to respond to an emergency

Learning to swim is a key component – and while no one is “drown proof”, having basic water competency can keep you and other swimmers safe.

Knowing what to do an emergency is also an imperative part of water safety.

- Understand how to recognize different types of swimmers.
- Reach or throw – don’t go!
- Never swim out to someone in water this is above your head unless you are trained with proper rescue techniques – there are many cases where parents or caregivers have tried to rescue their child and find themselves in trouble.
- Know basic first aid and CPR so that you can assist or provide care in an emergency until EMS arrives.

Reach out to your local parks and recreation or aquatic facility for information on swimming lessons, first aid and CPR courses. *(Tip: Be sure to look for a CPR course that teaches rescue breaths and compressions rather than compression only!)*

Learn more about the  
R.E.S.P.E.C.T. the Water by  
AOAP program or to view  
public service announcements



and presentations that can be shared  
within your community,  
scan the QR code here!

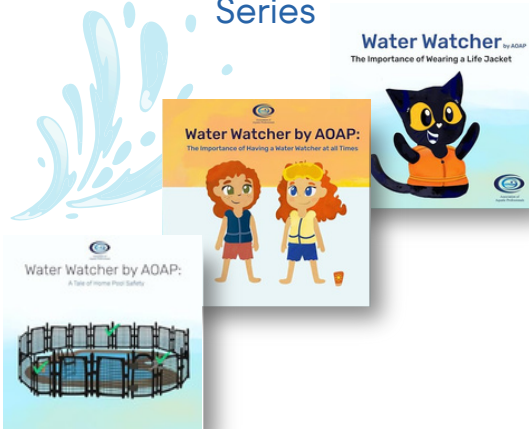
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