

Kids ... Water ... Safety ... Prayer

By Beverly Goldsmith

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Jeanine Millington of Brisbane, Australia, is certified by AUSTSWIM (the nonprofit Australian Council for the Teaching of Swimming and Water Safety) as a swimming and water safety teacher. Noticing news reports about an alarming number of child drownings in her area (an average of one per week for children under five in Australia), Sentinel contributing editor Beverly Goldsmith recently spoke with Millington about water safety as it applies specifically to children.

In Australia, and in the US where child drownings average about 30 per month, these deaths are all too common. Why are so many children drowning?

Children are apparently unaware of water hazards in or near their homes. Research pinpoints these hazards: ornamental garden ponds in the United Kingdom; sunken bathtubs in Japan; canals in the Netherlands; industrial containers used in homes in the United States; and private swimming pools in Australia, where drowning is the fourth most common cause of accidental death.

Children under five depend on the vigilance of adults to protect them. You need to be



so alert when children are around water. I remember an incident that happened in a friend's backyard pool. My friend and her mother swam to the end of the pool for a few moments. All of a sudden her son, a toddler, who was playing with mine on the pool's ledge, slipped off into deep water and went straight to the bottom. I was standing nearby and, fortunately, could immediately step into the pool and lift the child to the surface. He was not harmed. But I'll never forget how *silently* this happened. There was no noise to indicate that he needed help. It took place in a matter of seconds.

Can legislation help prevent drowning?

Governments can legislate for people's safety. Laws such as those requiring mandatory pool fencing are helpful. But the real need is for improved attitudes toward water safety, to be sure that young children have proper adult supervision around water.

What's your approach to teaching water safety?



For absolute beginners, I show them how to submerge, blow bubbles, float, and move themselves through the water. I would never use shock tactics like throwing a child into deep water. You can't fight fear with fear. Children need to feel safe, confident, relaxed, and happy in the water.

How do you teach kids to be fearless around water?

My job is to help pupils find out there's nothing to be afraid of. I have them do simple things in calm, shallow water where they feel safe and in control. I also like to praise, encourage, and reassure them. As they become more comfortable and confident in water, they move to more advanced activities. Then their fear disappears quite naturally.

At one school I had a child who had had no previous contact with water activities. He was so afraid. Often he refused to get in the water, or even to go near it. But when I told this little boy that God was right with him, keeping him safe in the pool, he improved. He became more cooperative and made good progress. Putting God into the picture for him brought about a change.

How does spirituality relate to your teaching?

I teach at church schools, so I'm able to remind pupils that God gives them strength, help, and protection. God upholds them and keeps them buoyant and secure.



In the pool, I approach each pupil with calmness and confidence. This enables clear, logical thinking. I act and speak calmly and confidently, in order to gain the child's trust. I never do or say anything to betray that trust. For me, teaching swimming is like praying – I replace fearful feelings with peaceful, pure ideas from God. God is in control.

What would you say to the community about children's water safety?

Everyone in the community has a role to play. Both adults and children should be aware of water safety rules. Adults (especially parents) need to stay alert, set the right example for kids around water, and help them develop good safety habits.

Being particularly watchful around children who are near water – whether at the beach or in the bathtub – will help save lives. And prayer helps bring that kind of vigilance.

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