



COMMON DROWNING MYTHS

Television has a lot to answer for when it comes to how drowning is portrayed. Many deaths occur purely because those nearby THINK they know how to identify a drowning in progress - loud cries for help, arms thrashing in the water, clear signs of struggle etc - when in fact drowning does not look like that at all. It is a silent struggle and happens quickly, with no thrashing movements. Parents and caregivers must be familiar with the real signs and symptoms of a drowning in progress and be aware that the appearance can vary widely.

Signs & behaviours of a drowning in progress

- Head low in the water, mouth at water level
- Head tilted back with mouth open
- Hair falling over the forehead or eyes
- Eyes glassy and empty, unable to focus
- Eyes open, with fear evident on the face
- Hyperventilating or gasping
- Body is vertical/ upright
- Trying to swim in a particular direction but not making progress
- Trying to roll over onto the back to float

Sometimes the most common indication that a child is drowning is that they don't look like they're drowning. They may look like they are treading water and just looking up at their surrounds. One way to be sure is to ask them, "Are you alright?" If they can answer at all – they are probably fine. If they give a blank stare, you may have less than 30 seconds to get to them and prevent a drowning occurring right before your eyes.

Children tend to make a noise in the water. If they're quiet - get to them ASAP!



A X



B ✓



C ✓

What does a drowning in progress really look like?

Most people imagine Picture A is an accurate depiction of a drowning in progress. In reality, Pictures B & C are more accurate - mouth at water level, head bobbing, body upright, little to no splashing and sometimes the appearance of doing doggie paddle.

Myth #1: Drowning children will shout for help

Drowning children are physiologically unable to call out. The respiratory system is designed for breathing - speech is the secondary function. Drowning children's mouths alternately sink below and reappear above the surface but while their mouth is above the surface, they need to exhale and inhale before they sink again. There is not enough time to cry out.

Myth #2: Drowning children wave their arms to attract attention or will thrash in the water

Drowning children cannot wave for help. Physiologically, a person who is drowning can not perform voluntary movements such as waving or moving toward a rescuer. Envisage the surface of the water as a platform. Someone who is drowning often presses down on the surface and tries to use it as leverage to get their mouth above the water's surface to breathe. So what the onlooker sees are arm movements that can appear to be playful swimming. Children will not kick wildly either. They remain upright in the water with no evidence of a supporting kick. They are quiet, focused only on breathing and show no signs of violent struggle. The child's struggle is quick -- 20 seconds, whereas an adult struggles for 60 seconds.

Myth #3: Drowning children are unsupervised children

50% of all child drownings will occur 25 metres or less from an adult who was distracted for only a few seconds.

Myth #4: My child has had swimming lessons so he won't drown.

No child is ever drown proof, no matter how good the swimming skills. A few swimming lessons are no guarantee when it comes to drowning prevention.

Myth #5: Water wings and flotation aids will prevent drowning

Water wings give a dangerous and false sense of security, often making children think they are stronger swimmers than they actually are. Flotation aids can also suddenly deflate.



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