

6-25-20 Park Views

By Lonny Flora, Recreation Manager for Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission

Think Water Safety with Ashland Parks and Recreation

Summer is here! As our community continues to progress through the COVID-19 pandemic we are all anxious to get back to enjoying outdoor activities, including cooling off in the summer heat. Unfortunately, this is the time of year that the Pacific Northwest sees a rise in drownings and injuries while recreating at lakes, rivers, beaches and backyard pools.

The CDC (Centers for Disease Control) reports that each day an average of 10 people die from unintentional drowning with at least two being younger than age 14. Drowning is the fifth leading cause of unintentional injury and death in the United States. The leading factors are inexperience in and around water, lack of barriers around bodies of water and lack of close supervision of swimmers. Another factor is location. Most drownings for children ages one to four occur in backyard swimming pools, while more than half of drowning accidents for people older than 15 years old are in open waterfront and beach settings. Other risk factors are not using lifejackets and alcohol.

Keeping inexperienced swimmers safe, even in shallow backyard pools and bathtubs, starts with understanding the foundations of water safety. The following is a list of the most important things we can do to keep our swimmers safe:

- **Constant Dedicated Surveillance**

Keeping young inexperienced swimmers safe in the water requires adult supervision. This is especially true for families with backyard pools where other household responsibilities, or the next Zoom meeting, can distract people while children are playing in water. Supervision is critical to keeping kids safe around water.

Even experienced adult swimmers should swim in groups, especially in open water settings, to keep one another safe. Brightly colored swim caps and personal buoys will help boaters be aware of swimmers nearby and avoid accidents.

- **Always Ask Permission**

One of the best habits your child can learn to be a safe swimmer is to always ask permission before getting in water. In any setting where water can be accessed make sure to teach and enforce that they ask an adult before getting in. Make sure when they do get in water there is a responsible adult supervising.

- **Life Jackets**

Proper use of a lifejacket for all ages, especially in boating activities, can be the difference between life and death. Lifejackets need to be comfortably snug and unable to slide over the face when arms are raised, with all belts and fasteners used to avoid misuse.

Also be aware of the type of life jacket being used and which activities each life jacket is designed for. The Oregon State Marine Board has more information on appropriate life jacket use on at Oregon.gov/osmb.

- **Learn to Swim**

Teaching children to swim, tread and float in water is the most effective way to keep people safe in the water. Many parents know that swim lessons can be frightening for swimmers with little or no experience in the water. However, there are some things that can be done at home that will help swimmers be better prepared for swim lessons in the future. In the bathtub you can pour water from the back of the head toward the front of the head so that water rolls down the face. This can help children be more comfortable putting their face in water in the future under supervised instruction.

It is also important to support your child being comfortable on their back in the water. This can be done by having your baby, toddler or child lay the back of their head on your shoulder while you support their body position to float face up in the water. By having body contact with a trusted adult in water your child will develop trust and experience that reduces fear when they are ready to work with a trained swim instructor.

Even though the Daniel Meyer Memorial Pool will not be open this summer, Ashland Parks and Recreation is focused on education and information to help keep the community safe in all types of water environments. More information and resources for water safety education and preparing for swim lessons is available on our website ashland.or.us/ThinkWaterSafety. We want to encourage you and your family and friends to visit our website and “Think Water Safety” in whatever water environment you choose to enjoy this summer!

AshlandParksandRec.org, ParksInfo@ashland.or.us, Facebook and Instagram @AshlandParksandRec #AshlandParksandRec #APRC #ThinkWaterSafety