DROWNING AND CHILDREN

Drowning is a leading cause of accidental death in children. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2012), drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional injury death for children ages 1 to 14 years and the fifth leading cause of death for people of all ages. In the U. S. there are approximately 800 drowning deaths (about two a day) of children each year (SAFE KIDS, 2016). More children in the U.S. die from drowning than from motor vehicle accident, bicycle accident, house fires, poisoning, or choking (Bennett, Quan & Williams, 2016). Approximately 2,600 children are treated yearly in hospital emergency departments for near-drowning incidents (momsTEAM). Of children who survive a drowning incident, approximately 20% suffer permanent neurological damage ranging from learning disabilities to a permanent vegetative state (Bennett et al.; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016).

Worldwide, a half million people die each year from drowning. For each death there are one to four drowning incidents serious enough to warrant hospitalization (studies cited in Salomez & Vincent, 2004). Deaths from drowning are more common in children. Worldwide, approximately 175,000 children die of drowning each year (WHO, 2004).

In Virginia in 2014, drowning was the third leading cause of child unintentional injury deaths and represented 10 percent of unintentional injury deaths.

Drowning rates are highest for children ages one to four with more than half of the drowning occurring in this age group. The second highest rates are for youth ages 15 to 19. Boys are twice as likely to drown as girls (SAFE KIDS, 2016; WHO, 2004). Drowning is often silent with
little splashing, waving, or screaming. It is also very quick. A parent or caretaker may have less than a minute to react and intervene once a child starts to struggle (SAFE KIDS, 2016).

Drowning deaths in the United States typically occur between May to August. The sites are varied and include bath tubs, swimming pools, lakes, canals, and rivers. They occur when swimming and when boating. The vast majority are considered preventable if recommended safety procedures were applied or if adequate adult supervision had been maintained. Risk factors for drowning include: lack of safety equipment such as life jackets, travel on unsafe water transport, alcohol use, boating in unsafe conditions, and vacationing in an unfamiliar setting.

**Prevention Techniques**

The following techniques were compiled from all consulted sources above.

- Young children should never be left unattended near water, including water in buckets and toilets. The most common reason for infant and toddler drowning is lack of adult supervision.

- For teens, alcohol is estimated to be a factor in 30 to 50 percent of drowning. All boat operators and swimmers and those involved in water activities should restrict alcohol use and teens should avoid alcohol use altogether.

- Personal floatation devices such as life jackets can reduce deaths by drowning and children who are boating or fishing should wear one. Adults should model the behavior and also wear a life jacket.

- Unnecessary accumulations of water should be drained. This includes draining tubs, buckets, containers and ‘kiddie pools’ immediately after use.
➢ Close lids on toilet seats or use locks. Keep doors to bathrooms and the laundry closed.

➢ Swimming pools require four-sided fencing at least four feet tall and self-latching gates.

➢ Wells and rainwater collections sites should be covered.

➢ Parents and caretakers should learn basic live-saving and cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

➢ Adult supervision is necessary. For example, solar pool covers and baby bath seats are not substitutes for adult supervision.

Older children should not supervise younger siblings.

➢ Teach children water survival skills (see SAFE KIDS).

➢ If several children are swimming together and there are several adults present, take turns being the ‘Water Watcher.’ The adult can hold a ‘Water Watcher’ card and then pass it to the next responsible adult.

➢ Swim in designated areas, preferably with life guards.

➢ Be aware of weather conditions and rip currents.

➢ Encourage all forms of media to publicize water safety tips.

Reference List is Available on the VCPN Website