



## Rescuing a drowning child, or what safety precautions to take when swimming with young children

Whether it's summer and you're planning to take your child to the sea or lakes, or whether you regularly go

swimming in the pool in winter, it's a good idea to pay attention to basic safety rules so that you can swim safely and with a smile.

Text: Zuzana Němcová  
Photos: Canva

For young children who do not yet swim on their own, it is essential that they first become familiar with the water in a safe and controlled environment such as a swimming pool.

The child should feel safe playing and moving in the water, which includes basic skills such as staying afloat with the help of a parent or swimming aids.

**IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THE CHILD DOES NOT LOSE THEIR CALM AND CONFIDENCE IN THE WATER AND IS ABLE TO ENJOY THE AQUATIC ENVIRONMENT WITHOUT FEAR!**

### WHAT SAFETY PRECAUTIONS SHOULD WE TAKE WHEN SWIMMING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN?



Safety when swimming with young children always starts with adult supervision. **Children should be supervised by an adult at all times, even in shallow water!** An adult should always be on hand to intervene immediately if needed. Young children can get into trouble very quickly even in relatively shallow water, so never leave a child unattended, even for a short time.

The use of **flotation devices** such as armbands or life jackets can help keep children afloat, but they **are not a substitute for personal supervision!**



Another important precaution is to ensure that **CHILDREN KNOW AND FOLLOW BASIC SAFETY RULES.**

Parents should teach the child to follow basic safety rules even if the child is not yet swimming independently. The child should know the following safety rules:

- Teach children not to enter the water without adult permission.
- It is important to follow the instructions of parents or instructors.
- Explain that running around the pool or on wet surfaces can be dangerous because of the risk of slipping and falling.
- When swimming in natural waters such as lakes or the sea, it is important to explain to children how to recognise safe swimming zones and how to avoid areas with fast currents or large waves. We want your child to understand the differences between calm water in a pool and waves or currents in natural waters.
- Explain to your child the dangers of jumping into unfamiliar water or swimming too far from the shore.
- The child should also know how to react in an emergency, for example how to call for help and what to do if they find themselves in trouble.

## WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO TEACH A CHILD HOW TO BE SAFE IN WATER?

The best way to teach your child to be safe in the water is to start water activities early and gradually increase their complexity.

- Start with your child in shallow water where they can safely move and play under your supervision.
- Gradually introduce him to deeper water and teach him basic swimming techniques, such as kicking his legs and moving his arms.
- Play games with your child that encourage breathing and orientation underwater, which will help him gain more confidence and skills.

Regularly practice these exercises with your child each time you visit the water environment so you can enjoy water fun together safely.

Teaching your child how to behave when they are in trouble in the water can be crucial to their safety. The same goes for you, the parent or lifeguard. **Let's look at the steps how to help your child practice self-rescue in the water.**



Children should know that at the first sign of a problem it is important to **IMMEDIATELY ALERT THEIR SURROUNDINGS.**

Teach your child to shout loudly "Help!" or "Help me!" and, if possible, wave their arms above their heads to get the attention of adults or lifeguards. Explain to the child that there is no shame in asking for help and that it is important to be seen and heard.



The next step is to **TEACH THE CHILD TO STAY CALM.** Panic can make the situation worse, so it is important that the child knows how to try to stay calm and composed. Practice breathing techniques with your child to help him or her stay calm in a crisis situation.

[You can download tips on breathing techniques HERE \(PDF size \)>>>>](#)

## Why are these techniques important?

- **Staying calm in crisis situations:** breathing techniques help your child stay calm and focused, which is key in situations where he or she is stressed or scared.
- **Improving emotion regulation:** Regular practice of breathing techniques teaches a child how to better manage their emotions and reactions to stress.
- **Promoting physical health:** Proper breathing improves oxygenation of the body, which promotes overall health and well-being.

## Tips for parents

- **Practice regularly:** Incorporate breathing techniques into daily activities so they become natural.
- **Be patient:** Children may need time to master the techniques. Be patient and supportive.
- **Make it a game:** Using games and fun elements will help the child to engage in the exercise with enjoyment.

Breathing techniques are simple but effective tools that can help children and parents manage stress in a variety of situations and promote calm and well-being.



**HELP YOUR CHILD LEARN TO STAY ON THE WATER IN BACK (star).** The back position is a rescue position in which the child can stay afloat with minimal effort and call for help.

### ➤ **Step 1: Preparation**

**Explain the purpose:** Before beginning, explain to the child why this position is important. Emphasize that the "starfish" will help him or her rest and breathe when feeling tired or distressed.

**Appropriate environment:** Start in calm, shallow water where the child feels safe. Ideally, the water should be warm and wave-free.





## ➤ Step 2: Warm-up exercises

**Relaxing in the water:** Allow your child to get used to the water and feel comfortable. Encourage him/her to lay on the water and feel its buoyancy.

**Breathing Exercises:** This will help reduce fear and nervousness.

## ➤ Step 3: Start with the "star"

**Body position:** Explain to your child that he or she should lie on his or her back, with the body stretched out as far as possible into a star shape.

**Support:** hold the child under the back (in the lumbar region) and head (not behind the neck) to make him/her feel secure. Slowly place him/her on the water and let him/her feel the buoyancy.

## ➤ Step 4: Hold the position

**Arms and Legs:** The child should have his arms and legs spread out to the sides, in a "star" shape, but not fully extended. Gently encourage them to maintain this position.

**Head:** The child should keep the head slightly bent back to keep the mouth and nose above water. The eyes may be closed or open. Push the belly button upwards.

## ➤ Step 5: Breathing and relaxation

**Regular breathing:** Teach your child to breathe slowly and evenly. Encourage him to take long, slow breaths in and out.

**Relaxation:** You can rock him gently to make him feel more secure.

## ➤ Step 6: Gradual relaxation

**Less support:** as soon as baby starts to feel comfortable, gradually reduce your support. Let him lean more on the water and less on your hands.

**Independence:** Eventually, baby should be able to hold himself in this position without having to hold on to you.

Be patient and keep encouraging the child. Each child learns at his or her own pace. Practise this skill regularly so that the child does not forget how to lay down on the water correctly.





In addition to calling for help, it is helpful for your child to know **HOW TO USE SWIMMING AIDS IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY.**

If your child is wearing a life jacket or has an inflatable ring, he or she should be able to grab onto these aids and stay afloat.

For more on swimming aids, see my article ["What swimming aids and equipment are suitable for young children on holiday?"](#).



Another important skill is the **ABILITY TO ORIENT IN THE WATER AND SWIM TOWARDS THE SHORE.** Your child should know that if they get into trouble, they should try to swim back to shore or grab onto any floating object available to them.

Simulate with your child different situations where he or she may need help and practice how to respond. In this way, the child will gain confidence and readiness for unexpected situations.

Parents would do anything to save their child from drowning.

**HOW SHOULD A PARENT ACT IN SUCH A SITUATION?**

Remember that **the safety of the rescuer always comes first**, because the panic of a drowning person can endanger the rescuer's life.

- Call other people to help or, if possible, alert a lifeguard. It is always better to have more people to help.
- When jumping into unfamiliar water (when we cannot see the bottom and do not know what awaits us there - shallow, deep, rock) **DO NOT JUMP INTO THE WATER, BUT DO STEP IN**, keep your feet planted (one foot in front and one foot behind), bend your legs when falling into the water and move your arms so as not to sink your head.



- When swimming for a drowning child, or any person for that matter, it is important **TO KEEP THE DROWNING PERSON CONSTANTLY IN OUR SIGHT!** When swimming, once you resurface, you may find the drowning person is underwater and you don't know where they have sunk. If you have a life ring or float, take it with you.
- Try to **COME NEAR TO THE DROWNING PERSON FROM THE REAR** so that the drowning person does not catch you and pull you under the water. Try to reassure the drowning person verbally, tell them you will help them. If the person panics too much, you may need to keep a safe distance.
- **GRASP THE DROWNING PERSON FIRMLY**, but in a way that prevents them from pulling you under the water. It is best to grab the person under the arms or by the shoulders. If you have a swim board or other aid, hand it to the drowning person so they can stay afloat.
- **SWIM ON YOUR BACK TOWARDS THE SHORE** and pull the drowning person behind you. Keep the person's head above the water and use the legs (frog on the back) to move towards the shore. If possible, keep the drowning person in the supine position, which makes breathing and movement to shore easier.
- After rescue, try to calm the person and provide warmth and dry clothing if possible. Even if the drowning person looks fine, it is recommended to seek medical treatment to rule out hidden complications. **IF NECESSARY, PROVIDE FIRST AID AND CALL THE EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES!**

Rescuing a drowning person is difficult and requires quick and decisive action. If you are not sure you can handle the situation, it is always better to call for professional help than to risk your own safety.

### **IN AN EMERGENCY, CALL:**

112 - the European emergency number you can call free of charge from a landline or mobile phone throughout the European Union. You can call the emergency services directly - the ambulance, police and fire brigade.

155 - Emergency Medical Service

Keep up-to-date on children swimming on my [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) too. You can share posts with other parents or email me with any questions you have on the topic.

[Instagram - #malaveza plavani deti](#)  
[Facebook - malaveza](#)