A behavioral approach to pediatric drowning prevention

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Infant Swimming Resource

Introduction
The mortality rate for drowning among infants and young children is a grim testimony to the failure of the traditional prevention strategies. Certainly, appropriate adult supervision and effective physical barriers are helpful, yet they are subject to human error. CPR, the last line of defense is, at best, an emergency management procedure with a highly uncertain outcome. Of victims who do survive near-drowning incidents, thousands suffer severe and permanent neurological damage. The need for an effective defense, after adult supervision and pool barriers have failed, is self-evident.

Objective
Infant Swimming Resource works to promote a clear distinction between swimming lessons and effective self-rescue training for infants and young children. A baby or toddler who has the physical strength and motor skills to escape adult supervision, defeat a pool barrier, and independently enter the water can, with Infant Swimming Resource instruction, be trained to survive.

Target
Infant Swimming Resource (ISR) has successfully trained over 225,000 infants and young children ages six months to six years to survive an aquatic accident. Over 7,000,000 lessons have been safely delivered throughout the United States and nine other countries. No former ISR student has drowned and to date, including 790 documented cases in which children have used their ISR training to survive an un-witnessed submersion incident. The success of this program is a result of a consistent focus on safety evolving from 45 years of professional guidance, extensive academic preparation, and research-based development by behavioral scientist, Harvey Barnett, Ph.D. When adult supervision and pool enclosures have failed, ISR Self-Rescue survival training provides the child a chance to protect him/herself until help arrives.

Methods
ISR has used its proprietary application of the specialized behavioral techniques and processes with over 225,000 infants and young children and educated their parents with the ISR Parent Resource Book. Instructors are trained and then licensed to utilize the system.

Results
In approximately 20 lessons of 10–minute duration, infants 6–12 months are taught to attain a backfloat posture in the water to breathe, rest and survive even fully clothed. In about 30 lessons, students 13–36 months can demonstrate a swim-float-swim survival sequence fully clothed. Parents of these students demonstrate increased knowledge of water safety and effective supervision where their infants and young children are concerned.

Evaluation
Each student’s registration information has been recorded and stored since 1966. Parents are surveyed and the information provides an extensive database upon which to continually evaluate the program. ISR students return for additional instruction to adjust to their ever-changing bodies. ISR enjoys an international media presence and well-known worldwide web presence. The program objective was and remains to save children from drowning. ISR has succeeded but continues to refine all aspects of the system from our constant evaluation of every facet of the program.

Discussion & Conclusion
Worldwide more than 600,000 children drown every year. Consistently experts have recommended, ‘supervision’ ‘fencing’ and ‘CPR’ as the basis for drowning prevention initiatives and most have not endorsed swimming instruction for infants and toddlers as a viable adjunct. The literature documents both an 88% protective effect of formal swimming instruction in the 1–4 age group, as well as the ability of infants and toddlers to learn aquatic survival skills. ISR evaluations and documentation evidence effective Self-Rescue skills learned by the students and an effective parent education effort: after lessons, parents felt compelled to be ‘more vigilant’ with their children around water and they properly identified appropriate supervision, not swimming ability, as the most important aspect of drowning prevention.

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