

# AQUATIC SAFETY RESEARCH GROUP, LLC

EDUCATION, TRAINING, CONSULTING AND EXPERT WITNESS SERVICES

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## **TOP TEN TIPS FOR IMPROVING FAMILY BEACH SAFETY AND ENJOYMENT**

BY TOM GRIFFITHS, ED.D.

### **1. WIND, WAVES, CURRENTS.**

All parents should understand that wind generates waves. The stronger the wind, the stronger the waves. Taller, more frequent waves mean stronger currents pulling swimmers away from the beach. When the “surf’s up” it is often too dangerous for the average swimmer, particularly small children. Above all, **“When in Doubt, Don’t Go Out!”**

### **2. NEVER SWIM ALONE: “IF YOU’RE MORE THAN AN ARMS LENGTH AWAY, YOU’VE GONE TOO FAR!”**

Swimming alone in the ocean can often be unsafe. Whenever venturing into the water, make every attempt to swim with another proficient swimmer. If you are a weak or novice swimmer, then select a strong swimmer as a companion. The same rule should apply to your children.

### **3. NO DIVING OR HEAD-FIRST ENTRIES.**

Two-thirds of all catastrophic neck injuries (apx. 800 annually) occur in open-water areas, *not* swimming pools. And no, the sand under the water is not soft and forgiving. Please remember that you can become a quadriplegic in just less than two seconds at a beach, simply by entering head-first from waist-deep water. Feet-first is the only safe way for you and your kids

to enter the water.

### **4. LOST CHILDREN.**

Water safety experts agree that the #1 problem at beaches is lost children. Lost children not only create water safety worries but child abduction concerns as well. To protect your children, establish a beach plan. Know where you entered the beach, where you will place your blanket and where you will meet if and when you become separated.

### **5. CLOSE, ACTIVE SUPERVISION.**

Many parents supervise their children passively – that is they watch their children with less than 100% attention. Cooking or cleaning might be acceptable chores while watching kids in your home, but around a beach or a pool you must actively, aggressively and attentively watch your children. If more than one adult is in attendance at the beach, take turns being the “Designated Kid Watcher” where this person only watches the children and is not allowed to read, sleep or perform other distracting tasks. Remember, it only takes seconds to drown.

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## 6. **LEARN HOW TO SWIM / WEAR A**

### **LIFEJACKET – THEY FLOAT, YOU DON'T!**

If you plan on a beach vacation, you should learn how to swim first. If you don't know how to swim, then waist-deep water can be dangerously deep. Non-swimmers and small children alike should wear a properly sized and fitted United States Coast Guard Approved lifejacket. Use them – they save lives.

## 7. **RIP CURRENTS**

Rip currents account for more than 80% of near-drownings in our oceans. While rip currents are very strong, they are extremely narrow, do not last long, and will not travel very far “out to sea”. Ask about rip currents at your beach. If rips are present, don't go in the water. If unexpectedly caught in a rip, don't panic. Breathe deep and gently swim parallel to shore. Don't fight the current – it will wear you out!

## 8. **TAKE FREQUENT BREAKS**

Don't allow your family to just sit on the beach or stay in the water all day long. Fatigue, sunburn, hypothermia (exposure to cold), heat exhaustion and heat stroke can all become problems. For your health and safety, take frequent breaks from the sun and water and take your children to the restroom. Whether *bathroom breaks*, *sun breaks* or *water breaks*, these can all be vitally important safety breaks. And don't forget about the sun! Apply SPF sunscreen often, especially when exiting the water. Wear hats and bring shade with you. Contact the American Cancer Society for details on preventing skin cancer.

## 9. **LOOK BUT DON'T TOUCH**

Many birds, turtles and marine life forms often wash up on beaches. When this happens, do not get too close and above all, do not touch the organism. You may hurt the creature or it may hurt you! Seek help from local authorities and let them deal with the problem. Don't let a photo opportunity turn into a tragedy. Look but don't touch.

## 10. **FOLLOW YOUR FLAGS, CHECK THE CONDITIONS OF THE BEACH**

Fortunately, many beaches across the United States are adopting a universal flag system. Learn the flag system at your beach, and always remember, “**When in Doubt, Don't Go Out!**”

### **COMMON FLAG SYSTEM FOR OCEAN BEACHES**

#### **DOUBLE RED (TWO RED FLAGS):**

Extremely Dangerous Conditions, *Don't Even Think* about going in!

**RED:** Dangerous Conditions

**YELLOW:** Caution: Moderately Dangerous Conditions

**GREEN:** Mild Ocean Conditions

*Find more safety tips, articles and information on education and training programs online at [www.aquaticsafetygroup.com](http://www.aquaticsafetygroup.com).*



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