



CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Adult vigilance can prevent kids from drowning

By Jane Sutter

Emeline Miller, daughter of former Olympic skier Bode Miller, was just 19 months old when she slipped out the back door of a neighbor's home in California and fell into their pool.

The resuscitation efforts of Emeline's mother, Morgan Miller, initially helped Emeline stay alive, but she later died at the hospital the next day.

In 2020, two years after Emeline's death, Morgan Miller posted a video on Instagram: "Time is not on our side when it comes to water, and even though my daughter was resuscitated, there was too much damage to her brain for her to survive," she said tearfully. "It takes seconds."

Since Emeline's death, Bode and Morgan Miller have raised awareness about water safety, including recording videos for the American Academy of Pediatrics' Drowning Awareness Campaign website.

"Drowning is the leading cause of death (nationwide) in children ages 1 to 4," Bode says in a video.

Morgan adds: "We believe it should be the No. 1 thing parents think about when it comes to safety."

According to the New York State Department of Health, more than 150 people drown annually in the state. In New York State, drowning is the fourth leading cause of death among



children ages 1-4 and the seventh leading cause for children ages 5-14.

Raising awareness about water safety continues to grow. In 2023, New York State Governor Kathy Hochul signed a new law that requires hospitals to show parents of newborns a brief state-approved video highlighting the dangers of drowning for infants and young children.

A big cause of drowning is the lack of supervision of kids around water, often at home, according to the New York State Department of

Health. Drowning can occur in as little as two inches of water.

The American Red Cross is one of many organizations that focuses on water safety, whether it be in pools or natural bodies like lakes and rivers. Michael Tedesco, regional communications director for the Western New York Region of the Red Cross, said parents who are signing up their kids for swimming lessons should make sure the instructor is certified by either the Red Cross or another organization focused on aquatics.

In the Rochester region, swimming lessons are offered by various organizations for children as young as six months with a parent or caregiver in the pool with them, Tedesco said. At age 3, children can get lessons without a parent being in the pool with them.

Organizations focused on water safety put the onus on parents to make sure kids are safe regardless of what type of body of water is involved. "Any venue you are in, commonsense rules apply," Tedesco said. "In the case of children, always have an adult supervising them within reach of them to be able to react in time, should an emergency happen."

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Most common causes of children drowning

- Lack of adult supervision around water, pools, bathtubs and buckets of water. This is often at home – drowning can occur in as little as two inches of water.
- Pools that do not have four-sided fencing that isolates a home swimming pool from the house.
- Swimming alone or wandering into water.
- Swimming in public areas where there are no lifeguards.
- Not using approved life jackets while swimming and boating.

Source: New York State Department of Health. To view or print a Safe Swimming Tip Card, go to health.ny.gov/SwimSafe

Home pool safety

New York State requires pool fences to be at least four feet high, but homeowners should check with their local municipalities on regulations that may require higher fencing.

When the home pool is not in use, gates should be closed and locked, Tedesco said. For in-ground pools, statistics show it is much safer to have a four-sided fence around the pool, rather than a three-sided fence that connects to the house, which allows access to the pool through a doorway, Tedesco said.

"Certainly, you want to have a pool alarm so if a child should have to be unattended for some reason and enters the water, there's notification that goes off," Tedesco said. Another option is installing an alarm on a house door that allows access to the pool. The alarm goes off when that door is opened.

When kids are in a body of water, parents need to be aware, be sober, and be within reach so if a child suddenly experiences difficulty, there's no delay in providing assistance to them, Tedesco said. "Everyone would love to lounge on a chaise, read a book, sip a beverage while their kids are playing in the pool, but that's not an ideal way to supervise."

Even with a lifeguard watching, parents need to be vigilant in watching their kids. "The lifeguard is responsible for dozens (at a pool) or in a public beach area, it could be hundreds of people. They are certainly trained to be vigilant, but I don't think anything replaces the supervision of a parent," Tedesco said. Even if a child is swimming in an area that has a lifeguard, it's recommended that he or she still swims with a buddy.

According to the state Department of Health, almost half of the people who drown are alone in the water at the time of the incident. Almost half of all drownings of individuals over the age of 14 are associated with alcohol or drug use.

LEARNING GOOD WATER HABITS:

The American Red Cross offers WHALE Tales online as a way to teach children about water safety. WHALE stands for "Water Habits Are Learned Early" and the nine lessons include short videos and printable activity sheets for grades K-2 and 3-5. There are also coloring sheets for grades K-2. The organization also offers a WHALE Tales discussion guide for parents and caregivers to use as they watch the videos with children.

The Red Cross also offers free online classes for parents and caregivers on the topics of water safety, orientation to swim lessons and how to be an ambassador for water safety. To find swim lessons for children, parents can go to the Red Cross website, click on training and education and put in their ZIP code.

Resources are available at: <https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies/water-safety/water-safety-for-kids.html>

Dangers of natural water

Bodies of natural water, such as a lake or river, pose additional challenges. "If you're in a lake and you can't see the bottom, make sure your kids go in feet first," Tedesco said. "You don't want to put your kids in a situation with the potential to be injured." Diving headfirst into shallow water and hitting bottom can result in lifelong injuries.

Besides watching their kids, parents should also be aware of the surroundings, Tedesco said. "Keep an eye on the weather patterns. If you sense a shift in winds or a drop in the temperature, you can be pretty confident that there may be a storm on the way, and it's absolutely critical that you get out of the water as soon as you hear thunder or you see lightning."

Tedesco also recommends that parents do their own self-assessment to make sure they are safe in the water. "More than half of the adults in the U.S. have never had swim lessons. It's not a bad idea to make sure, especially if you are going on vacation and you're going to be in the ocean, make sure that you're confident in your swimming ability, because you have not only the responsibility to keep your kids safe but to keep yourself safe. If you're not safe, you can't help your kids."

Parents should consider getting trained in CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) if they aren't already. "We recommend that anyone in any situation know CPR," Tedesco said. Many times, when a person suffers a cardiac incident, friends or family members are present. If they don't know how to perform CPR, that person's chances of surviving are diminished, Tedesco said.

Other things to know to prevent tragedies, according to the state Department of Health, are for parents to recognize that life jackets are not a substitute for supervising children when they are in or near the water.

Finally, if someone is drowning and struggling to breathe, they may appear to be splashing or waving, which is an involuntary response to try to stay afloat, according to the state Department of Health. Progression from struggling to drowning can happen within seconds.

Time spent in or on the water can be a highlight of summer for kids and teens in western New York, but it's up to parents and caregivers to be educated about the dangers and stay vigilant to keep young people safe.

Jane Sutter is a freelance writer based in Rochester.

BOATING SAFETY

The National Safe Boating Council offers the following tips on making sure a life jacket fits a child or adult properly. A snug fit is a proper fit. The jacket should not be too large or too small. Life jackets for adults do not work for children. For more, go to <https://safeboatingcampaign.com/life-jackets/>

1. Make sure the life jacket is properly fastened.
2. Secure all straps, buckles and zippers.
3. Have the child hold his arms straight up over his or her head.
4. Grasp the top of the arm openings and gently pull up to make sure the life jacket fits properly.

The U.S. Coast Guard's Boating Safety Division offers a website that is chockful of information to help recreational boaters improve their knowledge, skills and abilities in order to reduce loss of life, injuries and property damage: <https://uscgboating.org/>

HELPFUL VIDEOS:

The American Academy of Pediatrics offers helpful videos on a variety of topics, including drowning prevention for toddler and water safety and interviews with parents whose children have drowned, including Bode and Morgan Miller. The website also has printable reminder graphics and posters. <https://www.aap.org/en/news-room/campaigns-and-toolkits/drowning-prevention/>

Watch for These Warning Signs of Abuse in Minors

No longer wants to see a **particular person** they had been close to

Declining **academic** performance

Tries to hide use of **technology**

No longer interested in **activities** they used to enjoy

Changes in **personality**

Demonstrates **aggressive behavior** or constantly angry

Tries to get minors **alone**



Commits physical and emotional **boundary violations**

Withdraws from family or friends

Keeps **secrets** with minors

Gives lavish **gifts** to minors

Allows or encourages minors to **break laws** or rules

Has **inappropriate** or suggestive conversations with minors

Is overly interested in **spending time** with minors

Does not believe the **rules** apply to them (or, does not follow rules or protocols)

Takes **photos** without approval, or asks minors to send them photos

... and These Warning Signs of Perpetrators



ROMAN CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER

Creating a Safe Environment Newsletter

is published quarterly by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester with the aim of helping all of us keep children and vulnerable adults safe at home, at church and in all places in our community.

Comments can be directed to:
Tammy Sylvester,
Diocesan Coordinator
of Safe Environment Education
and Compliance,
585-328-3228,
or Tammy.Sylvester@dor.org.

Victims of sexual abuse by any employee of the Church should always report to the civil authorities.

To report a case of possible sexual abuse and to receive help and guidance from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, contact the diocesan Victims' Assistance Coordinator:

Deborah Housel
(585) 328-3228, ext. 1555;
toll-free 1-800-388-7177,
ext. 1555
victimsassistance@dor.org.

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ADDITIONAL SAFETY RESOURCES

ONLINE SAFETY RESOURCES

CHILDREN & TEENS' SAFETY SITES:

Webonauts Internet Academy:

<http://pbskids.org/webonauts/>
PBS Kids game that helps younger children understand the basics of Internet behavior and safety.

NSTeens:

<http://www.nsteens.org/>
A program of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that has interactive games and videos on a variety of Internet safety topics.

FOR PARENTS:

Common Sense Media

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/parent-concerns>
A comprehensive and frequently updated site that is packed with resources. Dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing information and education

Family Online Safety Institute:

<http://www.fosi.org/>

iKeepSafe:

<http://www.ikeepsafe.org/>
Resources for parents, educators, kids and parishes on navigating mobile and social media technologies

Faith and Safety:

<http://www.faithandsafety.org>
Safety in a digital world, a joint project of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Greek Orthodox Church in America

LOCAL RESOURCES AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Bivona Child Advocacy Center
(Monroe, Wayne counties):
www.BivonaCAC.org
585-935-7800

Chemung County Child Advocacy Center:
607-737-8449
www.chemungcounty.com

Child Advocacy Center of Cayuga County:
315-253-9795
www.cacofcayugacounty.org

Finger Lakes Child Advocacy Program
(Ontario County):
www.cacfingerlakes.org
315-548-3232

Darkness to Light organization:
www.d2l.org

STEBEN COUNTY: Southern Tier Children's Advocacy Center:
www.sthcs.org
716-372-8532

NYS State Central Registry
(Child Abuse Reporting Hotline):
1-800-342-3720

NYS Child Advocacy Resource and Consultation Center (CARCC)
866-313-3013

Tompkins County Advocacy Center:
www.theadvocacycenter.org
607-277-3203

Wyoming County Sexual Abuse Response Team:
585-786-8846

Yates County Child Abuse Review Team:
315-531-3417, Ext. 6