



LIFESAVING SOCIETY

The Lifeguarding Experts

For Immediate Release

WHO'S ON GUARD?

The Lifesaving Society wants parents and caregivers of young children to ask who's "on guard?" around water this summer

Toronto, ON – June 25, 2014 – This summer, the Lifesaving Society is helping to remind parents and caregivers of young children about the importance of water safety by introducing the new ON GUARD card, which identifies who is “on duty” when children are near or in the water. The card is meant to remove any doubt about who is responsible for minding the children, with a goal of reducing accidents or death by drowning.

Drowning is the second leading cause of preventable death for children under 10, and children under five are particularly at risk. The severity of the problem was highlighted in a report prepared by the Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario, which identified 13 drowning deaths of children under the age of five during the summer of 2010.¹

“Year after year we see tragic cases of drowning involving toddlers and young children,” said Dr. Dirk Huyer, Chief Coroner for Ontario. “In our 2010 report, we made preventative recommendations regarding supervision, wearing approved personal floatation devices and teaching swimming at the earliest age possible.”

Public education campaigns targeting parents and/or caregivers of infants, toddlers and school age children are critical. Prevention initiatives, like the ON GUARD card, stress the need for direct and continuous supervision any time a child is in or near water.

Most people believe that they will be able to recognize a drowning child because they will cry for help or splash and wave their arms. In fact, a child in distress is more likely to slip quietly under the water, unable to call or reach out for help. Drowning can happen quickly and quietly and go unnoticed even when people are nearby.

The ON GUARD card

The ON GUARD card is designed to help ensure that parents and caregivers are especially vigilant while supervising young children and non-swimmers in or around water.

The plastic card is worn on a lanyard around the neck and provides very specific tips to help parents and caregivers understand their role and supervise as effectively as possible.

Those who wear the card are responsible for committing 100% of their attention to their role as supervisor and for finding another adult to relieve them if they need to turn their attention away for any reason.

The card includes the pledge: "People ON GUARD pledge to maintain constant and vigilant supervision until relieved of duty".

Across Canada, 61% of victims under the age of five drowned while alone near water and 53% drowned while supervision was distracted.²

"Young children and toddlers have a natural curiosity and an almost magnetic attraction to the water," said Barbara Byers, Public Education Director for the Lifesaving Society. "They are conditioned to think of water as a place for fun – like playing in the bath tub or splashing in a pool – and this can give them a false sense of security. Parents and caregivers must pay close attention when children are in or near any kind of water. We developed the ON GUARD card to help make it crystal clear which parent or caregiver is responsible for supervising and to provide tips to make sure that they are supervising effectively."

In fact, pediatric experts support the idea that young children are impulsive around water and that their young brains are not capable of recognizing risk.

"Young children, especially under the age of five can be very impulsive, especially when excited" says Dr. Jean Clinton, an Associate Clinical Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neuroscience at McMaster University, division of Child Psychiatry. "Their focus is on what appeals to them in their immediate situation. They don't have all the thinking skills developed yet to understand potential danger or the consequences of their actions. They can recite the rules for safety but when they are excited they may not truly retain water safety skills and know when to apply them. As parents and caregivers, it's IMPERATIVE that we recognize these limitations and protect them."

Clinton adds, "The ON GUARD card is an important tool because it is a tangible reminder that really reinforces what our role is in that moment and ongoing as parents and caregivers. We are ultimately responsible for the safety and well-being of those in our care."

Individuals or organizations can purchase the ON GUARD water safety card online at www.lifesavingsociety.com or by calling the Lifesaving Society directly at 416-490-8844. The card costs \$7.50 each or \$125 for 25 cards.

References

1. Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario. Drowning Review. A Review of All Accidental Drowning Deaths in Ontario June 2011.
2. Canadian Drowning Report. 2013 Edition. Prepared for the Lifesaving Society by the Drowning Prevention Research Centre Canada.

From May 1st to

About the Lifesaving Society

The Lifesaving Society is a full-service provider of programs, products and services designed to prevent drowning. We save lives and prevent water-related injury through our training programs, Water Smart[®] public education, drowning prevention research, aquatic safety management and lifesaving sport. Each year in Canada, more than 1,000,000 Canadians participate in the Society's swimming, lifesaving, lifeguarding and leadership programs. For more information, please visit www.lifesavingsociety.com.

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