Special Needs Water Safety
Water Safety Introduction

- Water Safety is important for all families to learn
  - Especially important for families of children with special needs
- Multiple levels of water safety needed for families of children with special needs
- Water safety is a family effort
- A few simple steps can save the life of your child
  - Tragedy can strike within a matter of seconds
Types of Dangers Around Water

- Fear or aversion to water
  - Sensory issues, fear of unknown, overly aware of danger
- Lack of danger awareness
  - Developmental disorders can lead to a lack of understanding
- Drawn to water
  - Fascination leads to actively seeking water
  - Those who enjoy baths are often drawn to water
- Tendency to dart or bolt and stumble onto bodies of water
Water Danger Statistics

- Drowning is the leading cause of death for people with Autism (National Autism Society)

- Drowning is the second leading cause of death for ages 1-14, second only to motor vehicle crashes. (CDC)

- From 2005-2009, there were an average of 3,533 fatal unintentional drownings annually in the United States — about ten deaths per day.

- About one in five people who die from drowning are children 14 and younger. For every child who dies from drowning, another five receive emergency department care for nonfatal submersion injuries. (CDC)

- Children ages 1 to 4 have the highest drowning rates. (CDC)
Multi-Level Approach to Safety

• Empowering Children to Understand
  ◦ Learning the dangers of water
  ◦ Knowing the rules for water safety
  ◦ Understanding what to do if they ever find themselves in water

• Learning Water Safety as a Family
  ◦ Ensure that anyone babysitting your child understands the guidelines

• Being proactive as a parent
  ◦ Be alert, be present, be prepared

• Having the proper safety precautions in place
  ◦ Proper life jackets, fences around pool, floatation devices, toilet locks

• Knowing what to do in case of an emergency
  ◦ CPR and emergency protocol
Life Jackets

The first step to any water safety program is finding the proper life jacket for your child.

The Personal Floatation Device-Adapted PFD-A’s maintains the body stretched out in a dorsal position. It ensures greater stability in cases of morphological dysfunctions, involuntary sudden reflexes or loss of consciousness. **It greatly increase users' confidence.**

Life jacket Lj-A’s allows individuals to swim comfortably on their stomach and to float on their back. **It reassures the most apprehensive users and gives them freedom to acquire autonomy.** Great capacity to bring the face out of the water almost instantly.

Life Jacket-Adapted created a new safety vest able to maintain effectively one person on vertical. We call this latest Lj-V. Satisfy the need of verticality in clients with multiple handicaps. Great capacity to keep the body to the vertical, instantly.
Backyard pools: Always have a fence in place if possible, adding a barrier for children who are drawn to water.

- Set strict rules against swimming without supervision
- Do not keep toys in the pool
  - This can draw children into the water
- Do not put furniture too close to the water
- Use proper floatation devices while swimming
- Be wary of potential “break out” situations
  - Children who are drawn to water can be prone to sneaking out of the house to get to the pool.
  - Make neighbors aware of the risk - Ask them to tell you if your child is ever near the pool without you.
Public Swimming Pools

- Always be alert and present
  - Playing on your phone or reading magazines can be dangerous distractions

- Of the 750 children who drown each year, 375 will do so within 25 yards of a parent or adult (CDC)

- Do not rely on lifeguards alone
- Ensure that those playing with your child understand your family’s rules and guidelines for swimming safety
Water Safety on Vacations

- Children need to wear proper floatation devices at all times in the water
  - Do NOT assume that because they are in shallow water that they do not need the devices.
    - Lakes have drop offs, oceans have riptides, etc.
  - Children who bolt need to wear floatation devices at all times

- Always examine the pool upon arrival at destination
  - Is there a lifeguard?
  - Is there a fence that the child cannot open alone?
  - Be aware of any safety precautions in place
    - Locate floatation devices and shepherds hook.
      - These devices can be used to pull someone out of the water in case of an emergency

- The US Coast Guard requires all children under 13 to wear a lifejacket at all times while on a boat.
  - Never seat a child near the edge of a boat
Water Safety in the Home

- Water safety is not exclusive to large bodies of water
  - Babies can drown in as little as one inch of standing water (CDC)
- Bathtub Safety
  - Never leave a child alone in the tub
  - Always stay within arm’s reach
  - Always drain tub immediately after use
- Toilet Safety
  - Always have a lid lock in place for safety purposes
- Water Buckets
  - Empty all buckets and water containers immediately after use
What To Do

In the Moment of an Accident

• Assess the situation
  ◦ "Reach, Throw and Don't Go" (American Red Cross)

• Call 911 immediately
  ◦ It is better to have someone with you do this while you focus on the child

• Immediately begin CPR on the child
  ◦ If you do not know CPR, dispatch for 911 can talk you through the process until help arrives
  ◦ Continue CPR until help arrives.
CPR Certification

- Important for anyone working with children
- Done through several programs and organizations
- Red Cross, YMCA, etc.
- Private training sessions
  - Affordable and family focused certification
  - In-home training offered
Importance of Swim Lessons

- All children need to know what to do when they find themselves in water
  - Floating, doggy-paddling, swimming, etc.
  - The ability to stay calm in these situations is crucial

- Benefits of Swimming
  - Development of cognitive and gross motor skills
  - Increased muscle strength and endurance
  - Increased socialization
  - Higher ability of relaxation
  - Increased communication skills
  - Fostering courage, confidence, discipline and cooperation
Adaptive Swim Lessons for Physical Disabilities

• Begin by assessment of needs for swimming
  ◦ Proper floatation devices
  ◦ Feasible goals for swim program

• Find pool with needed accessibility
  ◦ Wheelchair lift, ramps, quiet pool space, etc.

• Benefits: Many children are able to do more movement in water than on land
  ◦ Water reduces pressure on bones and joints allowing them to move freely
    • Some can stand in water who cannot stand on land
  ◦ Swimming strengthens muscle tone
    • Improving coordination
    • Increasing endurance
  ◦ Water can often Relax the body
Adaptive Swim Lessons for Developmental Disabilities

- Begin by addressing discomforts around water
  - Desensitization Process: Step by step breakdown of fears or discomforts
    - Smell of chlorine, fear of water, unwillingness to dip toes in the water, etc.
    - Begin process by building a trusting relationship with teacher
      - Trust leads to confidence
  - Individually structured lessons
    - Some dive right in while others take a few lessons to get the courage to swim
    - Full understanding of the child’s strengths and weaknesses
ABC Swim Lessons

- Open to children and teens with ANY developmental disability
- One-on-one private lessons taught by an aquatic specialist
  - 30-60 minute visits, once a day for 3 weeks
    - Monday-Friday
    - 15 visits total
  - All swimmers must be properly protected for bowel and bladder concerns.

- Indoor, therapeutic pool complete with wheelchair lift and ramp
  - ABC Carmel Facility
    - 13431 Old Meridian Street, Carmel, IN 46032

- To inquire about lessons: Contact Sheiletha Quinn
  - 317-849-KIDS ext. 112
  - Sheiletha@AppliedBehaviorCenter.org