



# Could You Handle An Emergency?

Read this now so you won't panic when you need to save your child in a scary situation.

**I**magine this: You take your eyes off your toddler for just a few seconds in your neighbor's backyard, and suddenly you see her body at the bottom of the deep end of the swimming pool. Terrified, your first instinct is to leap in.

Don't do it. First tell another person to call 911, and then grab something that floats—like a raft or a chair cushion—

before you jump in, experts warn. "Most people actually aren't strong enough swimmers to get a child out of a pool without using a flotation device," says B. J. Fisher, director of health and safety for the American Lifeguard Association. "The child will drag you back down." This is just one of the many errors that parents make in those types of scary situations you have

nightmares about. Sometimes, we simply react without thinking. Other times, we rely on outdated medical information or home remedies that have no scientific evidence to back them up. Here are more worst-case scenarios, and the right and wrong ways to help your family.

### A cup of hot coffee spills on your child's leg.

**Wrong response:** Put ice on it.

**Smart move:** Quickly remove any clothing, run cool water on the burn for ten minutes, and then cover it loosely with gauze. Ice and even cold water may further damage the skin. "Your child can actually get a frost-bite-like injury if you put ice directly on the skin, especially if the skin is already damaged from a burn," says Bob Waddell, who trains paramedics in pediatric care for the National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians. Don't put butter or antibiotic ointment on the burn either. If the wound blisters, call the doctor, especially if the blisters are larger than a quarter.

### You're driving and see a tornado approaching.

**Wrong response:** Take shelter under an overpass as soon as possible.

**Smart move:** If traffic is light and you can see that the tornado is distant, try to drive out of its path by moving at a right angle to it. Otherwise, park your car and go inside a sturdy building, says Roger Edwards, a meteorologist at the Storm Prediction Center. If you're in open country, run to low ground away from cars and trees, which could be blown onto you. Lie face-down, protecting the back of your head with your arms, and tell your children to do the same. "Seeking shelter under a bridge or an overpass offers little protection against deadly flying debris," Edwards says.

### You lose your child in a store.

**Wrong response:** Search for him yourself.

**Smart move:** Call out to your child, do a quick search, and then immediately find a store worker. "Don't be afraid to ask for help," says Nancy McBride, national safety director for the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. "Store associates have been trained to know what to do if a child is



## If you spill hot coffee on your child, putting ice on her burned skin can cause even more damage.

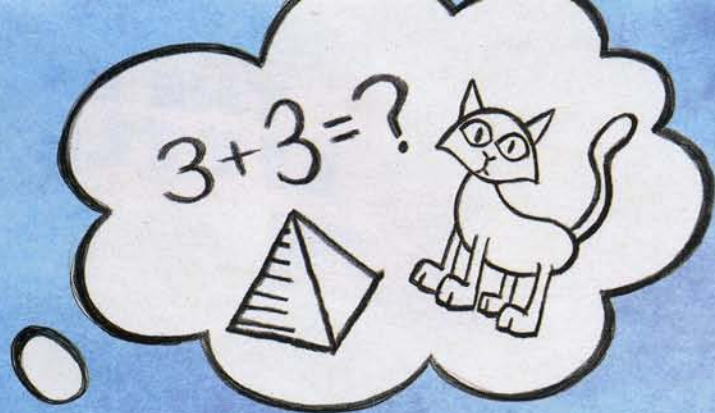
missing—manning exits and entrances, checking restrooms, and looking under clothing displays." If you don't find your child soon, call the police.

### You're confronted by a black bear while hiking in the woods.

**Wrong response:** Play dead.

**Smart move:** Most black bears are not interested in people and can be scared away, says Tim Smith, a former wilderness EMT and owner of Jack Mountain Bushcraft and Guide Service, in Masardis, Maine. Stand up as tall as you can (hold your arms up to appear bigger), and speak in a deep, loud voice while backing up slowly. If the bear charges or starts to attack, believe it or not, you should fight back vigorously. If you can, hit him in the

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nose, since that's a bear's main sensory organ. Whatever you do, don't run. "If you run, the bear is going to chase you, and it can run faster than you can," says Smith. However, you should play dead if a brown grizzly bear charges at you, because they typically won't be scared away. (There are no grizzlies east of the Rocky Mountains.)

### You find your toddler holding your prescription medicine. The top is off, but you don't know if she's eaten any.

**Wrong response:** Watch her carefully for signs of sickness.

**Smart move:** Call Poison Control immediately at 800-222-1222—experts are available 24/7. "Don't wait to see what happens," says Richard Dart, M.D., director of the Rocky Mountain Poison and Drug Center. "They'll be able to tell you right away if the medicine is toxic and whether you should take your child to the emergency room." Some poisons take a while to have a serious impact, and by that time it could be too late.

### You and your child get caught in a strong rip tide.

**Wrong response:** Try to swim directly toward shore.

**Smart move:** Swim parallel to the beach until you're beyond the pull of the current, and then slowly swim back to shore so you don't get tired. Most riptides are only 20 to 60 feet wide,

says Fisher. People can drown when they panic or become exhausted struggling against the current.

### Your child gets hit by a baseball and falls to the ground, unconscious.

**Wrong response:** Take him to the hospital.

**Smart move:** Call 911. He could have a spinal or brain injury, and moving him could make the injury worse, says Anne Stack, M.D., clinical chief of pediatric emergency medicine at Children's Hospital Boston. Make sure that your child is breathing and that he has a pulse. If he doesn't, start CPR immediately. Otherwise, shake him very gently and call his name to see whether he'll wake up.

### Your child gets stung by a jellyfish.

**Wrong response:** Put rubbing alcohol or urine on the wound.

**Smart move:** Rinse it with sea water (fresh water will make the wound even more painful) and remove any visible tentacles, recommends Paul Auerbach, M.D., an emergency physician at Stanford University Medical Center and author of *Medicine for the Outdoors*. Then soak a napkin or cloth with white vinegar and apply continuously until your child no longer seems to be in pain. (Lifeguards often carry a vinegar solution. But if none is on hand, send someone to get some from a nearby home, store, or restaurant.) Vinegar will deactivate the stinging cells of most

jellyfish, which otherwise can cause pain for 30 minutes or more. If your child has any sign of an allergic reaction (difficulty breathing, wheezing, or hives), seek emergency medical care right away.

### Your child gets poked in the eye with a stick.

**Wrong response:** Pry her eye open to look for an injury.

**Smart move:** Gently cover the area by taping gauze or a clean, dry washcloth to her face, and then head to the E.R. Trying to open her eye, putting ice on it, or applying pressure could cause more problems, which can lead to vision loss, says Dr. Stack. Covering her eye will make it harder for your child to rub or touch it—and if the cornea has been scratched, keeping her eye closed will ease the irritation.

### Your car plunges into a river.

**Wrong response:** Wait until the water pressure is equalized, when water has covered the door, before trying to get out.

**Smart move:** Every minute is precious, so don't wait, says Pete Gannon, president of Dive Rescue International, which provides water-rescue training. As soon as you hit the water, unfasten your seat belt and try to open a door or window. Even

if you have power windows and automatic door locks, hit the button, because they'll probably still open for a few minutes. If you can't open anything, focus on breaking a window by hitting it in the corner. "Most car windows are tempered, so if you hit them in the corner, they will shatter into small pieces," says Gannon. Use a hard shoe, a soda bottle, one key poking out of your fist, or, better yet, keep a small LifeHammer (which can also cut seat belts off) in your glove compartment. It's true that it will be easier to open the door once the pressure has equalized, but it could be too late or the door could be jammed.

### Your child gets bitten by a snake that could be poisonous.

**Wrong response:** Apply a tourniquet or try to suck the venom out with your mouth.

**Smart move:** Call an ambulance or just get to your car and head to the nearest emergency room, where antivenom can be administered. Call the hospital or Poison Control on the way because some hospitals will need to fly in the antivenom. Minimize movement of your child's bitten limb (carry him if you can) and keep it below heart level. "I've had many cases where the injury caused by a tourniquet was worse than the injury from the snake bite," says Dr. Dart. ☆

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