



As soon as your child is old enough to learn his numbers, you can prepare him to help during an emergency. Here are a few lifesaving lessons to teach.

Dialing 911

"From age 4 on up, your child should be able to dial 911 in the event of an emergency," says Julie Dutton, communications manager of the Garden Grove, California, police department. First, define what an emergency is for your child, so she doesn't think it's okay to call for help with a game, for example. "Tell her to use 911 only under one of the following circumstances: if Mommy or Daddy asks you to; if Mommy, Daddy, a babysitter, or another adult passes out and you can't wake him or her up; if there's fire and an adult isn't present; or if you see an accident and it looks like people are hurt," Dutton says. Rehearse mock-dialing 911 with your child, and teach her to answer the operator's questions imply and not to hang up until the operator tells her to.

Aid for a Chronic Illness

If you or your spouse has a chronic illness, start mentioning it to your child at about age 5, and talk to him about what he can do in an emergency, suggests Charles F. Pattavina, M.D., a director of the American College of Emergency Physicians. "Simply calling 911 is key," Dr. Pattavina says. "But in many cases, your child can do things to help while the rescue vehicle is on the way, such as getting juice or sugar for a diabetic parent who is having an insulin reaction."

Basic Water Safety

School-age kids should learn basic water-safety skills (particularly important if you have a backyard pool). Teach your child how to assist someone who needs help in the water without putting himself in danger (reach out with a kickboard or a towel, or toss a flotation device into the pool); how to open someone's airway; and for older children, how to give resuscitating breaths.

The Heimlich Maneuver

Children as young as 5 can learn this important technique for saving someone from choking, says Connie Harvey, a health and safety expert for the American Red Cross, in Falls Church, Virginia. For information on lifesaving and water-safety classes for kids as young as 4, contact the American Red Cross. Check the white pages of your phone book, or log on to www.redcross.org.