

## Lessons from Lylah: The Role of Swimming Lessons in Drowning Prevention

*By the Water Quality & Health Council*

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A Florida dad recently dove into a backyard pool, clearing a 4-foot high safety fence in his path to save his 1-year-old son from drowning. The boy had wandered inside a pool fence, which unfortunately did not completely surround the pool. In an instant the boy had fallen into the water. [News](#) and [video](#) of that heroic rescue were broadcast widely, including the dad's honest admission that the fence configuration was not completely secure.



Drowning is the #1 cause of accidental death of children of ages 1 – 4, according to the [National Drowning Prevention Alliance](#), and shockingly, 88% of child drownings occur with at least one adult present. That's why the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) recommends creating “layers of protection” to keep toddlers safe around pools. These include: secure pool fencing; alarms on pools, doors, and gates; pool covers; window guards for windows that face the pool; designated “[Water Watchers](#)” to pay constant attention to children in the water; life jackets; [CPR training](#) for parents, caregivers, and pool owners; and *swimming lessons*.

### *Lessons from Lylah*

There is evidence that many children over the age of 1 year benefit from swimming lessons. Although estimates are imprecise, one study showed participation in formal swimming lessons was associated with an 88% reduction in the risk of drowning among 1- 4 year old children.<sup>1</sup> Whereas swimming lessons do not “drown proof” a child, they provide one of the critical layers of drowning protection.<sup>2</sup> We believe

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<sup>1</sup> Brenner, R.A., et al. (2009). Association between swimming lessons and drowning in childhood: a case-control study. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*, 163(3):203-210.

<sup>2</sup> Denny, S.A., et al. (May 2019). Prevention of Drowning, Policy Statement from the American Academy of Pediatrics, Vol. 143, Issue 5.

all children should have swimming lessons, not only for safety in and around water, but because swimming is a “gateway skill” to a host of other healthy and pleasurable activities, such as sailing, water skiing, canoeing, diving, and fishing. To help achieve the goal of swimming lessons for all children, we are pleased that the American Chemistry Council has, this summer, once again donated \$5,000 on our behalf to [Lessons from Lylah](#).

Lylah was the two-year-old daughter of Air Force Master Sergeant Josh Gavulic, who died during military training exercises in 2014, leaving Lylah and her five siblings fatherless. Along came the “[Angels of America’s Fallen](#)” program, which provides healthy activities, including swimming lessons, for the children of America’s fallen military and first responders. Thirteen months after their father’s death, Lylah and her siblings were on a waiting list for healthy activities of their choice when Lylah tragically drowned in the family swimming pool. Perhaps if Lylah had learned to swim, she would be alive today. *Lessons from Lylah* is an initiative of Angels of America’s Fallen.

We are deeply grateful that the American Chemistry Council donation to *Lessons from Lylah* was once again made in memory of our beloved late colleague, [Dr. Jerod Loeb](#). Dr. Loeb was a leader in the field of healthcare administration and a community first responder in Buffalo Grove, Illinois. A treasured member of the Water Quality & Health Council “family,” loving husband of Sherri Loeb, and proud father of two high-achieving daughters, one of whom is a first responder herself, we are confident Dr. Loeb would have been a strong supporter of *Lessons from Lylah*.



*Dr. Jerod Loeb*

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