

A sunburst graphic with numerous thin, light gray lines radiating from a central point behind the text.

Healthy Moms Podcast

BY **Wellness Mama**[®]
simple answers for healthier families

Episode 171: How to Keep Kids Water Safe with
Tips From a Water Safety Instructor

Child: Welcome to my Mommy's podcast.

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Katie: Hello, and welcome to the "Healthy Moms Podcast." I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com and this episode is super important if you have kids because I am here with a certified American Red Cross water safety instructor. Josh Spears grew up in a family of lifeguards and was always around the water from a very young age. Josh worked as a lifeguard in high school and after having to pull multiple children out of the water he became passionate about preventing drowning and became a water safety instructor through the American Red Cross.

He has now taught hundreds of kids to swim and has also taught many parents to teach their own children to swim without stress or fear, and we're gonna dive into all of that today, and how to keep your kids safe in and around water. So Josh, welcome and thanks for being here.

Josh: Great, thanks so much, Katie. Thanks for having me.

Katie: Of course. I think this is such an important topic, and obviously there's so many questions I wanna ask you and get into the really practical stuff of how can we all as parents keep our kids safe? But first, I always love to hear your story. So how did this become such an important issue to you?

Josh: Yeah, good question. So I started years ago, kinda like you mentioned, growing up as a lifeguard, water safety instructor, etc. I've always had a deep love for water. I think water just always makes everything better, whether it be social time, family reunions, etc. I just think it just helps to get people relaxing and just takes their mind off a lot of things and puts them in a little bit more just in the present moment. So I've really just

been passionate about water for a long time. Certified through PADI scuba diving, you know, some experience on a swim team, etc., and so I've always been passionate about water.

In regards to water safety and even just helping parents or equipping parents to teach their kids how to swim, there was an event that happened some years ago. I was actually on vacation with some family members and we were hanging out at the hotel pool. We were swimming, having a good time, and I saw this father working with his son trying to teach him how to swim. And you could visibly see the frustration on the father's face. You could see the fear and frustration on the child's face. And, you know, I kind of debated. I went back and forth, I was like, you know, "Should I offer a couple tips? I don't wanna overstep and interfere in someone's family life and, you know, father-son moment."

But after a few minutes I was like, "Man, it's just really painful to watch." And so I went over and I said, "Hey, do you mind if I share a couple tips? I notice you were working with your son and trying to teach him a couple things. I helped a few kids in the past learn how to swim, and I've helped parents working with their kids. Do you mind if I offer a couple tips?" And he looked at me with a sign of relief on his face and he's like, "Absolutely."

So I jumped in and just offered some really basic, basic tips as far as floating on the back, just even how to kick correctly, and blowing bubbles. Just a few really basic things. And within, gosh, maybe 15 minutes he made more progress than the previous half hour, or hour, whatever it was that his father had been working with him, and he was so much more relaxed. And the father, he looked at me and he's like, "Man, thank you so much." And I could just see he was a lot more relieved as well. And it really kinda made me think, "Man, just impacting one parent's life with a couple tips, 10, 15 minutes. What could you do if you created a course or program that would teach parents the same simple skills and concepts but through more of an online format so that you could reach out to a lot of people?"

And so that was kind of the moment that got the wheels turning, and it wasn't until the last couple years that I really looked at it a little bit more intensely. In fact, probably three years ago I was working with some kids and I kinda laughed to myself as I was teaching. I realized that I do the same five steps for every student, and no matter if it's a child or adult it's the same five steps, and it doesn't change. You learn these steps and you learn how to swim.

Katie: Yeah, I love so much about what you just said and I wanna unpack so much of that, but first, I have to say I totally agree with you about the water making everything more fun. I'm also PADI certified and love the water, and I think it's innate to humans. So many of us, we feel this pull toward the water, and especially toward the ocean, and to lakes, and bodies of water. And now we know there's so many cool health benefits of being in the water, especially in the ocean. You're getting magnesium, you're getting grounding, you're getting Vitamin D. There's a really strong physical reason that we crave water, but I also know that for parents, it can be a really stressful thing because we know the statistics. We know that, at least from what I've read, you can probably clarify this, that accidental drowning is one of the leading causes of death in children.

And so I think that maybe the father who was so frustrated, probably there was some fear there because it is such a big issue. It's so important that our kids do learn how to be safe around the water, and I'm sure you saw that firsthand as a lifeguard, what happens when kids aren't taught water safety or they're reckless around the water. So as a parent, I'd love to go deeper into this. Why do you think accidental drowning is such a big issue in today's world?

Josh: Yeah, no, I totally agree with what you said, especially in regards to the health benefits of water but even just the stress that the parents pick up on around water. So I don't know if you heard, just a few weeks ago Bode Miller, an Olympian Alpine skier, his, I believe, 19-month-old daughter drowned. And it was a very, really sad situation, but an all-too-common situation where, I guess, the mother was over at a neighbor's house. They had a pool, and looked down. I guess she was inside the house visiting with her neighbor. Looked down, and this was a very short period of time. And she said, "Wait a minute, where's my daughter?" So she immediately went outside to the backyard and her daughter had fallen in and drowned. And I think that's a big reason why there's so much of that fear in regards to parents around the water because it only takes an instant. It can happen so quickly.

Yeah, you mentioned one of the leading causes of death. Yeah, according to the...I'm sorry, World Health Organization, it's the third-leading cause of unintended death, so it's a really big issue. And it's one of those things that I really believe a lot of these drownings could be prevented if we had a little bit better education, and not just with kids but also parents, you know, some different ways to keep our kids safe.

I heard a story from one of my friends the other day. And very similar to what happened to Bode Miller, it was a, my gosh, some kind of family get together, family reunion, etc. A lot of family members together, I think they had some friends over also. They were having kind of a pool party, barbecue type deal, and one of the kids drowned. And what happened was everyone's socializing and parents are talking to other parents and thinking that, "Oh, well, the older cousin is in the pool watching, or Uncle So-and-So's watching, or my neighbor is watching the kids." And in a lot of ways, shame on us as the parents to assume someone else is watching our kids.

So I think there's a lot of things that we could do a better job as parents. First of all, if you're in a setting like that where there's a lot of other kids, other family members, never assume that someone else is gonna watch your child. And also know the setup of the pool. Know the setup of, well, even your child's ability. Like, should they be farther off the steps, or farther from the wall? If not, then, you know, you may have to rein them in and watch them a lot more closely. So I think there's a lot of factors that go into that, but just like you mentioned, it is a really big issue for parents because there is such a high drowning incidence, especially in the U.S.

Katie: I think that's such a good point, and you said something really important. You said, like, the parents' attitude and their response is really important, and I'd love to go deeper on that, really understanding that connection of what are some things that we can do as parents in our attitude in and around the water? I know for me at least, my mom witnessed a really traumatic water experience when she was young, and so she had a pretty much lifelong fear of the water, and I'm really grateful that she didn't pass that onto us. She made sure we had swim lessons and spent lots of time in the water.

But I know like you talked about, there can be these experiences or passed-down emotions from family members that really make it hard to overcome. So I'm curious, first of all, if you could tackle, like, how important is it that, as parents, our attitude around the water and how we portray that? And then the secondary to that would be, what are things we can do to make sure that we're passing on a healthy attitude and respect for the water?

Josh: Yeah, no, that's a great question. So percentage-wise, there's a very high percentage of people, I can't

remember off the top of my head, but a very high percentage of people that have had a near-drowning experience. And if you've had that you tend to take that fear into your parenting, so it's always, you know, "Don't go near the water," or, "Make sure you've got your life vest," or some of these things, which don't get me wrong, I think in and of themselves are good. You should have a life vest if you're in water sports and some of these other things.

But for parents, when they're talking about water you need to consciously stop and ask yourself, "How am I portraying this? Am I making it sound like a really fearful, frightening thing? Or am I making it sound like a fun event, and something that's gonna help instill confidence in the child, and very good memories around water in regards to family, friends, etc.?" So one thing that I've seen is that parents that instill that fear in the kids, it takes a lot of work to break through that fear in that child, especially as you're trying to teach them to get comfortable in the water, stop tensing up. Because it's hard to swim when you're tensed up and fearful.

So part of what I encourage parents to do is keep it fun, and there's a lot of different ways you can do that. One, you know, try to take your fear out of the equation, and that's why teaching the child how to swim is so important. If you're the parent, if you don't know how to swim then I would say definitely get comfortable with the water and learn how to swim yourself, because that's gonna help eliminate some of that fear. And that's also gonna show the child that, "Hey, my parent is in the water having a good time. Okay, I can do that, too."

So I would say be really careful about the conversations you're having. Make sure that it's not fear based. Also make it really fun, so have games around the water, maybe have snacks that you're not always enjoying just so that those early memories around the water are positive and not fear based. So that's what I would say in regards to that. And tell me the second part of the question.

Katie: I feel like you probably already tackled most of it, but just practical things that parents can do to make sure that they're keeping their own attitude, like you said, positive so that we're not passing on that fear?

Josh: Yeah. So I think those are the main points in regards to that, just keeping it fun, positive associations, and more education with the parents. One thing I did wanna touch on, because I mentioned life jackets, I see a lot of parents put their kids in the little puddle jumpers, or water wings, life jackets, those types of things, and then they just let them go in the water. And I've never been a big fan of those for a couple reasons. One is it puts the child in a vertical position, and if you're learning to swim that's really hard, especially if you've been trained to stay in that vertical position because you wanna be in a horizontal position when you're swimming.

So I've also experienced, and this is from years as a lifeguard and some of these other things I've done where the child was so accustomed to being in a life jacket, puddle jumper, water wings, etc., that they would jump in the water thinking that they were gonna come right back up and float and didn't because they didn't have the life jacket on. And so I've seen more negative come from wearing these devices, especially at a young age versus not. Now with that being said, as parents we have to be on top of our kids a little bit more in regards to watching them and paying attention to what they're doing in the water.

And so I totally understand it does give parents peace of mind when they do have life jackets, puddle jumpers on in the pool. But it's also teaching bad skills, and I can't tell you how many times I've seen this happen where the kid's gotten so used to it, jumped in the water thinking they had it on, and went straight to the bottom. And so that's another reason why I encourage not using those, and instead teaching swimming skills in place

of that.

Katie: That's a great point, and I think of it almost like with teaching kids to ride a bike. Because I've also never been a fan of training wheels for that same reason, so we've always defaulted to the balance bikes which at least they still...they're propelling themselves with their feet. It doesn't have pedals yet but there's nothing holding them up. They have to learn that balance themselves. And it makes totally sense exactly what you're saying that if they learn in their whole positioning and everything, they get comfortable in the water in this one way. And then it gets so much more scary when they have to change the way that they're floating and the angle that they're at, and their face is in the water more and they're not used to that. It can seem even more intimidating I would guess.

And I think something else you said is super important, not just even in the water but across all aspects of parenting, because I think especially in the water, and certainly we should be cautious and respectful of the water because it can be very powerful. But I see so many parents that default to, like, the "Be careful, be careful, be careful," constantly in parenting in general, but especially around the water. And I had a recent...another podcast interview with a children's mental health expert. And basically there was this idea that challenging and even "scary experiences" are actually really important for kids. If it's something that they are afraid of in theory they actually need to experience in a loving way, obviously with parental support, but experience and overcome it. Because we kind of, I think, maybe have this idea as parents that if our kids have a scary experience they're gonna develop a phobia.

And what the researcher was saying is that actually the opposite is true. When kids are allowed to avoid an experience that's challenging or scary they develop the phobia then because it's an unknown and it's scary to them, whereas when they conquer it, like all of us as adults probably are nodding our heads. When you conquered it it's no longer scary because you understand it, and you have skills, and you've learned. And I feel like maybe in the water especially that's such an important thing. So I'm curious, what age do you recommend getting kids started in the water?

Josh: No, that's awesome. I was literally nodding my head the whole time as you were talking about that. I totally agree. So in regards to what age, as early as possible. What's crazy is kids are drawn to the water and they naturally know how to swim. If you take a really young child, put them in the water, their natural inclination is to kick. And so I say as early as possible. Get them in the water so they're comfortable. Hold them close so they're still safe, and then as they get more comfortable then you can start teaching them some other skills.

But we've had kids at a very young age, less than two years old able to swim, and a lot of people look like, "Oh, that's crazy." Well, these were also parents that understood the importance of swimming, and just how the more exposure to water in a proper manner, the better, so that these kids at less than two years old are so comfortable and are swimming like fish. So at a very young age. I mean, a lot of times in the past when we were working with parents we'd say three months is great.

But we've had three to six months is kind of a happy, like, a good point where parents feel a little bit more confident now with their child, and understand that they're not gonna break the child, that type of thing, getting them in the water, and then really just getting them comfortable with it. Now at that young age you wanna make sure that the water temperature is a little warmer typically. That helps with their comfort. But yeah, just taking them to the water, encouraging them to kick a little bit, getting them comfortable on their

back, getting a little water in their face. Those types of things are great, especially at a really young age. And it just helps to lay that foundation for swimming.

Katie: Yeah, that makes total sense. So I wanna go deeper on the idea of swim lessons, because I've used your system and my two-year-old is swimming, which is so much fun. But I'm curious on a higher level of that, just on the topic of swim lessons in general, how big of a difference do they make as far as children being safe around the water? I know the flip side of that is that we can't just assume that because our kids have had swim lessons, we don't have to watch them. You still always have to make sure we're very alert, like you said, of our kids around the water. But I'm curious from all your experience teaching swim lessons, do you see that data play out that kids having more of these skills in the water can reduce that risk of accidental drowning?

Josh: I absolutely do. There's a situation that really comes to mind, and this was a child that was, gosh, I think he was just over two years old, somewhere between two and three years old, so he was young. He had fallen in, and one of the things we teach them is if you fall in, how to get to the side and how to climb out of the pool, and he did that exactly. Fell in, I think the situation was his parents were around and I guess they were by the pool. I don't know if he tripped, something happened. Anyway, he ended up in the water, and right away, the training kicked in and so he was able to get to the side.

So yes, we have seen that happen multiple times where the skills that they were taught, it kicks in when a situation arises, they fall in, or fall off a float, or whatever the case might be. And instead of just panicking, they go to those skills that they learned and they're able to get to the side, get to safety. So yes, we have definitely seen a correlation with swimming and safety. The other thing that we really tie into is the water safety skills as far as just respecting water, and being around it, and that type of thing as well.

Katie: Yeah, that's a great point, and I know that now that I live pretty close to water, that's one thing I always notice, and it's humbling even as an adult who's a strong swimmer. Truly, especially the ocean, the water is so powerful, it reminds you how small and insignificant we actually are compared to something that massive, and I think that is an important point. We always have to keep that respect. And another thing that you can probably speak to with the lifeguarding background and water safety instructor is I know I've seen things online about how drowning doesn't always look like what we think of with drowning, and most likely your kid's not gonna be flailing around and screaming for help a lot of times. But can you speak to that?

Because I know the stories you mentioned, and I've seen this as well in community pools where a child went under and kind of just started drifting away right next to a parent. There was no screaming, and kicking, and thrashing around where the mom knew. Just they are so quiet, and then obviously thankfully we all jumped in and the kid was fine. But I feel like that's maybe a misconception that we're speaking to is that it's not like the movies. They're not gonna be necessarily flailing around, and that's why we have to be so alert.

Josh: Yeah, no, you're exactly right. One thing that I was really surprised by when I first took the lifeguarding course when I was, gosh, I guess 16. They said the reason that lifeguards call breaks, it's not really so much for the lifeguards. I mean, it is some for the lifeguards but it's more for the kids because they get so tired swimming, playing, not even realizing it. So that all of a sudden, a kid's been going hard for an hour or what have you, and then they're in the middle of a pool. All of a sudden, they're super fatigued and they can't make it back. And so what you're saying in regards to, yes, drowning doesn't always look like what we see in the movies.

There was a situation where a kid went down a water slide and it was kind of the same thing where he was already fatigued. It was close to the time to call break, and goes off the water slide, and then realizes, "Whoa, I'm tired. I'm not making it back," and goes under. Luckily I saw it and so I was able to jump in and pull him out, and he was totally fine. But it wasn't as exciting, I guess, as you see in the movies where they're yelling, they're splashing, they're making a big commotion. It was really subtle. And so that's another great point, Katie, where as parents, we gotta acknowledge that, you know, just because our child's not screaming, "Help, help," you know, doesn't mean they're not in trouble. So once again, just more awareness on the parents' side can make a huge difference.

Katie: Absolutely, and I definitely would say, by all means, I consider myself more of the free-range, not overprotective parent, but I would say water is the one place that you do want eyes on them the whole time for all the reasons we've talked about. That doesn't mean they shouldn't play, and I'm all about my kids going down slides, and jumping off the side, and diving, and all that, but I'm still gonna watch them. Because in the water, it's truly like seconds make such a big difference.

Josh: Yeah, absolutely.

Katie: So I've been taking some notes but I'm curious if you kind of have any other general guidelines that you would recommend to the parents always keep in mind. So obviously not being on our cell phone, paying attention to the kids. I love that you talk about not using, kind of, life jackets and puddle jumpers as crutches when they're young. And I would guess also the basics, like lifeguards are always saying, "Don't run near the pool because you can fall and bump your head." And then it doesn't matter if you can swim, things like that. But are there other general guidelines that you would recommend that parents really keep in mind?

Josh: Yeah, I think there's a couple. So yeah, just what you said, parents not being on their phone, being aware. And one thing that lifeguards are always taught to do is scan the pool. So you start at one side, go to the next, depending on the size of the pool, sometimes you're counting swimmers, some of those things. So I would encourage parents to constantly be scanning the pool also. And you can still visit with friends, family, and engage in conversation, but you still just have to be aware. So one thing that I tell parents is make sure your back is never to the pool, especially if your child's in the pool. You wanna make sure that you're able to see the surroundings, and that way, in case something does happen, you're there. You're able to see it, you can respond quickly. So that's one thing.

In regards to some other keys with water safety, I always encourage people, if you have a pool at your house, have a gate around it. Now not that that's a foolproof safety measure but it does help considerably. The other thing that I really encourage people to do is get an alarm. They have a few different types of alarms now that if something breaks the surface of the water, it goes off and it can alert the whole house. Those are great, especially you're inside and everybody should be inside. All of a sudden, you hear the alarm and think, "Okay, that's not good." You run out there and it can really help to prevent some of those drownings.

So those are a couple things that I'm really big on. The other thing that I like to mention to a parent is if you are participating in water sports, like if you're boating, if you're water skiing, jet skiing, whatever, make sure you do have the proper safety equipment, like, the U.S. Coast Guard-approved life vest. And make sure that as far as...well, and not just kids, also adults. I'm a big proponent of this is the buddy system so that you're not swimming alone.

I was talking to a friend of mine the other day, she was a competitive swimmer and a water polo player. And one thing that...we were just talking about water safety and different things. She said, "The one thing that a lot of people don't take into account is if you're swimming by yourself, how easy it is to just fatigue yourself. And you may cramp up, and some of these other things that can happen. And if you're in the middle of a lake, or a pool in some cases, that can be a bad situation." So it's always better to swim with somebody, to have someone with you just in case you do get into trouble. And even if you're a fantastic swimmer, these things can still happen.

I remember hearing a story, somebody else I know was a lifeguard and this happened at their pool. There was a competitive swimmer. He had a great reputation, fast, you know, very efficient in the water, really good at knowing his limits. Well, one thing he would do is practice holding his breath, and he would just swim on the bottom and go from one side to the next, and just keep kinda pushing the limit to see how far he could go. Well, one day, when he was practicing this, something happened, and so the lifeguard saw him at the bottom. At first, they thought he was just playing around. And then they were like, "Wait a minute, this is not good." So jumped in, pulled him out, and they were able to revive him and save him. But it's always important to have a buddy, have somebody that you're swimming with, just in case something happens.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely because you hear that, unfortunately, all too often of Olympians, competitive swimmers, people who obviously know what they're doing in the water having water accidents or even drowning when they're on vacation with family, or just swimming. And it's a good reminder that none of us are immune to that, it doesn't matter. And I think the same thing with, like, the life jackets. I totally get your point. Kids don't need them in the pool when we're there with them but if you're doing open water sports, absolutely, like, adult should be wearing them, too. And I think that's a super good time that parents have to set the good example, too. It's super important.

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Katie: So another thing, okay, so I feel like a lot of times parents think of swim lessons as something really difficult and it's something they want to outsource because they don't know how to do it and it can seem really daunting to teach kids how to swim, especially like we already established, there's so much on the line. The risk of failure is a big deal when you're talking about the water. And that's what I loved about your course. That's why I wanted to talk to you. So explain to me why do you think parents are great swim teachers for their own kids and why that's a great way to teach the kids to swim?

Josh: Yeah, and that's a really good question. And I've heard the comment from parents, like, you know, "I wanted to take my kids to someone else to teach them." And I understand that, and in a lot of ways I'm probably calling out people, and even myself in a lot of ways, you know? I have two kids, and I think in a lot of ways it's a cop out where it's easier, in a certain sense, to say, "Hey, you teach my child this." And a lot of times it's because of fear, not feeling like the parents are able to. Because I had so many parents say, "I would love to teach my child how to swim, I just don't know how. I just don't know how to teach them." And I totally get that. You wanna make sure, especially with a life-saving skill like swimming, you wanna make sure that they have a good instructor, that they're learning the right skills, that they're not developing bad habits.

So one of the reasons why I think parents are the right person to teach a child how to swim, if you think about it, but we as parents are our child's first teacher. So we teach them how to eat, how to shower, how to brush your teeth, how to go to the bathroom, how to talk. We teach them all these different things. Why not teach them how to swim? And if you look at it, typically our kids trust us as parents more than anybody else in the world. So it makes sense to put them with someone they already trust to teach them these very valuable life-saving skills. So that's a big reason why I'm such a proponent of this.

Studies have also shown that it helps with bonding, parent-child. It develops a lot of great memories, so that I've had older students say, "Yeah, some of my favorite memories are in the pool hanging out with my parents playing." And so it really does a lot of good not just for that bond but also for the emotional, the physical, and even the mental. It develops some confidence in both the parent and child, and you can create some incredible memories with your family.

Katie: Yeah, for sure, I love that. And I'd love for you to just talk a little bit more about the course because one of my favorite things is how efficient it is. I feel like I didn't have to watch hours and hours of video. It wasn't like I had to go get certified to be a water safety instructor. Like you said, it's these five steps, they're super simple. You can watch one a day and implement it and it's not hard or daunting at all. But kinda walk us through that and how you found this five-step approach.

Josh: Yeah, absolutely. So I think I mentioned it earlier. A few years ago I was teaching a child how to swim and I stopped, and I kinda laughed to myself. I thought, "Man, I do the same five steps with everyone, with everyone." And I realized some years ago that most things in life are pretty simple. We complicate things, but if you can break something down to five steps, something that anybody can do, it just makes learning that skill so much easier and quicker.

Malcolm Gladwell talks about 10,000 hours to master any skill. Some other people have kind of debated that, talked about that, and I can't remember who it was now, and you might remember who, Katie, but they said that 20 hours gets you really efficient at most skills. And so the course is not even designed to be a 20-hour

course, I tell people, though, the more exposure you get with your child in the water the better. So you're just learning the basics. Are you gonna be an Olympic swimmer after this course? No, that's not what it's designed for, but it's laying that foundation. It's teaching you the basic steps to swimming.

So when we recorded the videos we went through tons of footage, and I looked at it and I thought, you know, "This is great but I'm a parent and I want something that's gonna be short, sweet, to the point. Something that I'm not gonna have to spend tons of time learning, watching, and reading over." And so we essentially stripped out everything else that wasn't necessary and put the basic, best content that we could in the videos. So five steps, videos with instructions, so I'm talking through it, giving demonstration. And then there's also a PDF that goes with it. So depending on your learning style you've got the audio. You get to see the hands-on, and then you can also read through the PDF format as well.

Katie: Yeah, I loved that part because as a mom, and I'm sure, you're married so you can probably attest to this with your wife, but moms are some of the busiest people on the planet so I loved that I didn't have to get a PhD in understanding everything about the water. I could just learn how to teach my kid to swim. And like I said, I did it with my two year old. The five steps took me five days, but then within two weeks she was totally comfortable in the water and it was a good reminder to make sure I keep my eyes on her because now she'll just go jump in and swim, and she loves it. So I really appreciate that you kept it efficient because moms are super busy.

Josh: Yeah, no, and I totally relate to that. Our daughter is two years old and she's the same way. They get to this point where they get passed the fear, and the uncomfortableness of maybe laying on your back, or facing the water, that type of thing, and then they're gung-ho. So it's kind of that double-edged sword in a lot of ways where now they're really able to move in the water but they're still young so you really gotta watch them. But it's fun to see them take off and just learn these skills, and in such really a relatively short period of time, and just following some basic steps.

Katie: Yeah, for sure. I think maybe actually you would have a better sense of this but it seems like with my kids that the earlier you get them exposed to the water and start teaching them, like you said, even when they're little newborns you can do it, the less fear they seem to have in general. I think kids are naturally wired not to have that much fear. They're naturally wired for adventure and maybe we instill the fear in them a little too often.

Josh: I totally agree with that. So this is kind of a funny story. So my wife was not around water a lot as a child, and so at an early age our oldest son, I'd get water in his eyes. And of course when they're young they don't love it but they just have to get used to it. So come bath time my wife didn't understand the philosophy, and so she would bring a towel for him. So when I had him in the pool and all of a sudden he'd be asking for a towel I'm thinking, "Where is this coming from? I've never said, 'Oh, here's a towel.'" And then after talking to my wife she said, "Yeah, that's me. I was giving him a towel at bath time," this, that, whatever.

I was like, "No, that's not what you wanna do at all." So we had to change some of that. Now he loves the water and doesn't care at all if water's in his eyes, any of that. But for our daughter, my wife understood this is how we get him comfortable with water in the eyes, in the face. And so right off the bat she would kind of blink a little bit, sometimes cry initially. But then after a very short period of time she was totally fine. And so you're right, there's a lot of these fearful ideas that we get where we're thinking, "Oh, that's uncomfortable, let's try to change that." No, that's good. You want them to feel uncomfortable initially. Kind of like you talked

about earlier on, some of these things that we're afraid of we do, and then we remove that fear because we've done it. And so yeah, I totally agree with that.

Katie: Yeah, and I think those early skills are so important because they build, and even just the little things like being comfortable with water in your eyes. I have a now almost 12 year old who has the adventurous streak so much and is a junior lifeguard. He's PADI certified now, and I remember when he got certified to scuba dive you have to go down to 35 feet and then clear your mask, or you'd have to take your mask off, put it back on underwater, and then clear it so you can see again. And I think I was more nervous than he was, and he just did it. He didn't care if he had water in his face, he was totally fine. And I'm like, "See, it's building on those skills because he's never been afraid to have water in his face. He's been doing that since he was two."

But it's interesting to see, and I think, like, to your point, it's so important to teach these skills and reinforce them early because kids do have that natural sense of adventure. And I'm sitting on my hands and biting my tongue now that my kids are approaching the teenage years to not be the mom going, "Be careful." Because I want them to have those adventures but it's such a good reminder to make sure that we just instill the good skills early so that they're safe when they have these adventures.

Josh: No, I totally agree. It's funny, I was talking to a buddy of mine yesterday and somehow it came up, cliff jumping and other water activities, and all of these things. And it does make you think, like, think of all these things that I did, and I've gotta be okay with my child doing these things as well. And we were talking about just different components of water and where, you know, when you're in high school, you're not really thinking, "Is this safe or not?" You're thinking, "Is this gonna be fun?"

And so once again, going back to those early skills that you're teaching, you're still teaching them water safety. So yeah, cliff jumping is great. Make sure you're not jumping on rocks. Make sure that you're not doing some of these things. So yeah, the foundation you lay at a really young age continues on into teenage years, into adulthood. But just teaching them safety, and skills, and things that you know they'll be okay on their own.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely, and I think back to another recent podcast episode I did with a woman from Brain Harmony. Her name was Carol and she is an occupational therapist who works with kids and she said, "Because a lot of kids aren't getting enough of these experiences, and the things that kids actually need for development, like being upside down, and being buoyant in the water, and balancing on things, and jumping off of things, and climbing."

Like, we think of these as just fun childhood activities but it turns out they're actually completely vital for their brain development. And when kids don't do this, they miss out on critical steps and then that shows up as, like, slow learning in different areas of school because the brain is developing, and that's how the right brain and left brain connect, and how the limbic system develops. And so she loves things like swimming because she's like, "It's the alternating sides of the body, and the alternating right and left hand. And it teaches the brain that criss-cross." Same with things like being upside down in the water, or rolling in the water, or balancing. Things like that are so good for kids. So it's cool to know there's so many other health benefits as well.

And I know that we've been talking about your course this whole time, but please tell people where they can find it online. Of course there will be a link in the show notes as well as to...I just found that TED Talk that you mentioned with Josh Kaufman about 20 hours to learn everything. I'll make sure that's there as well, but let us

know where to find the course.

Josh: Yeah, so you can find us kidslovetoswim.com, and there, we've got some safety tips, we've got some videos we've done, and of course, access to the course that we're excited about. I think it's really gonna help a lot of people, and it's such a valuable skill. Everybody should know water safety and how to swim, so kidslovetoswim.com.

Katie: Awesome, and again, that link will be in the show notes. If you're driving, be safe, don't worry about writing it down. You can find all that at wellnessmama.fm. A couple unrelated questions that I love to ask as I wrap up are, firstly, is there a book that has really had a big impact on your life or that you'd recommend?

Josh: Yeah, you know what? Absolutely. I love to read, although sad to say I don't do a ton of reading now. I do listen to podcasts all the time. But I read a book, gosh, this is probably...well, no, this is definitely over a decade ago now, and it was a fitness book. It was called "Power to the People" by Pavel Tsatsouline. And at the time, I was just looking to get some more information and education on the game of strength. Spent a long time working in that field. And the book was great. It simplified strength training and that whole skill in regards to the different types of strength cycles you can do, periodization. It simplified it so much that I was amazed.

And so it did a couple things for me. It really made me, I guess, question the status quo, and look at things from a different standpoint to say, "Okay, how can I actually simplify this, this, this, and this?" So I would say honestly, in a lot of ways, the idea of "Kids Love to Swim" and the simplification, I got some of that idea over 10 years ago as a result of this book. If you're into strength, fantastic book, highly, highly recommend it. But it also opens your eyes to other ways of looking at subjects.

Katie: I love that. I'll make sure we link to that as well, and congratulations because that is a new recommendation. There's some recurring themes of books that seem to pop up a lot and I love that that's a new one, so it sounds awesome. Definitely would recommend that to people. And lastly, this podcast will be heard by at least a couple hundred thousand people, and so I'd love to ask if there was some advice that you could spread far and wide, or give to a lot of people, what would it be and why?

Josh: Gosh, that's a great question. I would probably say that most things in life can be broken down into five steps. And we've kind of talked about this a little bit, but we complicate things so much as humans. But to get efficient at most things you can break it down into five steps, and I don't wanna get super philosophical here but there's, I think, five steps to most things. And I think we just like to, gosh, sometimes let our ego get in the way and talk about...show people how much we know.

And really I think if you wanna simplify things, I think you can break life down into five steps, and if you were to do that you would look at religion/spirituality. You gotta know where you come from in order to know where you're going. The second step in life, I would say relationships. Without meaningful relationships, life is kinda boring, kinda sad and lonely. The third step in life, I would say taking care of your body through proper nutrition, proper movement, proper supplementation when necessary. The fourth step, I would say deals with finances and contribution. Earn well so you can give well. And the fifth step I would say is education, and within that comes music, philosophy, etc. So I would say if you master these five steps you're gonna live a very fulfilled life. And this is obviously not an overnight deal but I think you can simplify so many things in life and we just like to complicate things as humans.

Katie: That's great, I love that, and two things especially, the relationships and community part. I feel like the older I get the more I realize just how important, I think so much more than so many things we try to concentrate on more in life and having been to Europe recently especially. I went into it trying to figure out, why are they healthier? Why do they live longer? And I think even if you just look at the fact that they have stronger relationships and community, that alone goes a long way toward explaining it.

Because we're built for community, and we're built for relationships, and we know the statistics that when you have strong relationships, and family ties, and even just community wherever you are. It doesn't have to be blood relatives but just people that are like family, that's more important than quitting smoking for health. That's more important than exercise. It's truly important, we need other people, so I love that that's one of your steps. And I also loved that you said education because I think never in history have we had such an amazing opportunity. Like you said, you can listen to podcasts all day while you do other stuff, or we have all this knowledge available at our fingertips, most of it for free on the internet.

If you wanna open-source take an MIT class you can. We've never had access to this kind of information and it's astounding and amazing. And I think you're right, they're easy to say and a lifelong challenge to master. But it doesn't have to be so complicated.

Josh: Absolutely. And I think at this point because there's so much information out there, shame on us if we're not trying to learn something new, you know? We get comfortable in our life and I say try to go outside of that comfort zone and learn a new skill. Listen to something educational, informative, and question the way you live your life and try to simplify things.

Katie: Yeah, great advice in the water to get out of our comfort zone a little and also in life. It feels like we've come full circle, I think, in this episode, and I know that you are an incredibly busy person so I'm really grateful that you took the time to share here and to pass on this wisdom to parents. We talked about it in the beginning, I think this is such an important issue. It truly is one of the few things as parents that is life or death, we do need to get this right. And I really appreciate that you are putting so much work into helping parents do that and your time for being here. Thanks so much, Josh.

Josh: Thanks, Katie, so much. I really appreciate you having me and look forward to talking with you soon.

Katie: And thanks to all of you for listening and I hope to see you again next week on the "Healthy Moms Podcast."

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