Communicating with Patrons

**Goal:** To improve your lifeguard team's communication skills when enforcing rules with patrons

**Recommended Group Size:** At least 6

**Approximate Time:** 20 minutes

**Materials, Equipment and Supplies:**
- Newsprint and markers
- Copy of In-Service Training Report

**Leader's Note:** Prior to conducting this in-service training, write the following situations on newsprint:
- An 8-year-old running on the pool deck.
- A group of teenagers listening to extremely loud music in the picnic area.
- A parent is upset that another patron's swimsuit is too revealing for a public facility.
- A 40-year-old man drinking from a glass bottle next to the pool.
- A 12-year-old throws a handful of pennies into the pool next to the main drain and begins diving for them.
- A patron is upset over an “unexpected” change in the pool schedule.
- A former competitive swimmer who says she is trained to dive in 4 feet of water.

**Location:** Classroom

**Activity Leader:** Lifeguarding instructor, lifeguard supervisor or other qualified personnel, such as a human resources representative or school guidance counselor

**Key Points:**
- Communicating with patrons is an important part of your job.
- Communication as an injury-prevention strategy requires lifeguards to—
  - Inform patrons about the potential for injury.
  - Educate patrons about inappropriate behavior.
  - Enforce rules and regulations.
- When interacting with patrons, it is important to create a positive atmosphere. To build a positive relationship with patrons, you should—
  - Treat people as you would like to be treated.
  - Be courteous and mature at all times.
  - Never insult or argue with a patron.
  - Speak clearly and make direct eye contact.
  - Keep interactions brief and direct but pleasant in tone and manner.
  - Take all suggestions and complaints seriously and follow up as necessary.
  - Do not make any promises you cannot keep.
Enforce rules fairly and consistently.
Focus on the behavior, not the individual.
Call your supervisor if you have difficulty communicating with a patron.

Special Consideration When Caring for Children

**Key Points:**
- Children have unique needs that require a special type of care.
- Caring for an injured or ill child requires that a rescuer recognize the child’s fear and anxiety.
- There are important characteristics to remember when checking a child.
  - Checking a conscious infant’s or child’s condition can be difficult, especially if he or she does not know you.
  - At certain ages, infants and children do not readily accept strangers.
- When checking a child, remember to—
  - Obtain consent from a parent or guardian, if present.
  - Observe the child. Do not rush up and touch the child.
  - Remain calm. Children will be more upset if you are excited.
  - Speak directly to the child and explain what you plan to do. Speak clearly and use simple terms.
  - Do not separate a child from loved ones.
  - Start your check at the toes and work toward the head.
  - Gain the child’s trust through your actions.

Special Consideration When Interacting with Parents of an Injured Child

**Key Points:**
- Some parents can be more anxious and emotional than the child when their child is injured.
- If this is the case, it is important to attend to the parent to assist in keeping the child calm.
- When dealing with an anxious parent, remember to—
  - Bring in a second staff member to assist the parent so the child continues to receive your full attention.
  - Reassure the parent, help them call family members or their child’s doctor.
  - Remind the parent that the staff is taking care of the child.
  - Keep the parent focused on filling out forms, talking to the staff and remaining calm. It is critical they do not transfer their anxiety to the child.
Special Consideration When Caring for an Older Adult

Key Points:
- Caring for an older (elderly) adult requires that you keep in mind special problems and concerns.
- Often the problem seems unimportant to an older adult.
- Often the loss of independence will cause an older adult to avoid seeking treatment.
- Do not talk “down” to an older adult as if the victim were a child.
- If appropriate, the older adult should be taken to a facility for medical treatment.
- Individuals close to the older victim should be alert to signals of unusual behavior.

Leader’s Note: Review any facility policies related to communication as an injury-prevention strategy with your lifeguard team. This discussion should include information on how lifeguards should contact their supervisor if they have difficulty communicating with a patron.

Activity:
- Have lifeguards form two lines.
- Tell the group that those in one line will play the role of the “lifeguard” and those in the other line will play the role of the “patron.”
- Instruct the first person in each line to begin role-playing the first situation listed on the newsprint when you say “Action.” Each segment should last no more than 30 seconds.
- Stop the role-play by saying “Cut!” The first person in each line will go to the back of the line and the second person in each line will become the actor.
- Instruct the second person to begin role-playing the second situation listed on the newsprint when you say “Action.”
- Continue in this manner until all situations have been played out or all lifeguards have had an opportunity to act out a situation.
- After all situations have been played out, have lifeguards reverse roles so that the line of lifeguards become patrons and the line of patrons become lifeguards.
- Continue the role-play until all situations have been played out or all lifeguards have had an opportunity to act out a situation for a second time. Each segment should last no more than 30 seconds.

Wrap-Up Questions:

After each role-play has been played out two times, ask lifeguards the following questions:
- “Were lifeguards able to communicate effectively with patrons in the time allotted?”

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- "Did lifeguards change the way they communicated with patrons based on the age of the patron?"
- "Did lifeguards change the way they communicated with patrons based on the behavior in which the patron was engaged?"
- "Were there communication methods lifeguards used to handle their situation that you would avoid when communicating with patrons?"
- "Were there communication methods lifeguards used to handle their situation that you would apply when communicating with patrons?"