

Dad's duty never done

Earlier this summer a man accidentally drowned at the community pool where my family swims. He apparently had been practicing breathing exercises for scuba diving and lost consciousness for a short time before he was pulled from the water. The victim was in his late 20's, an Army Reservist who, as my wife had previously pointed out to me, was in great shape for any age. The accident was a sharp reminder of water's inherent danger, and made me worry all over again about my children's safety while swimming.

The next time I was in the pool playing with my 8-year-old son and 6-year-old daughter I was extra vigilant. I realized that even as they grow older, I still watch their every move as if they were the same age as their toddler younger brother. I try to anticipate unsafe conditions and prevent mishaps, and issue endless warnings about not running down the driveway (too steep), staying out of the way of each other's backswings, etc., ad nauseam.

Obviously it's only natural for parents to concern themselves with their children. And I'm sure I err on the side of caution. The thought of one of them taking a header chasing a ball down that steep driveway, cracking bones or knocking out teeth literally gives me the shivers. But I'm not always hovering, either. Eight-year-old Max took a nasty bad hop off the side of his head in June and I never left the dugout, for example.

Of course when Claire's 16 instead of 6 she's the one who might shiver at the thought of my grilling her date. But if I don't take the initiative to let the kid know I'm entrusting my daughter's safety to him, what kind of father would I be?

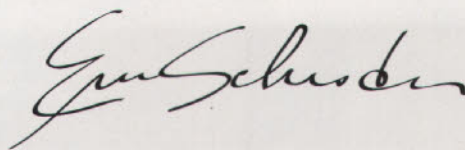
I don't want to break my arm patting myself on the back. I'm sometimes impatient with my children and I always treasure a day away from the ruckus. But Job #1 for me is being a good dad, and that means spending time with your kids. Just imagine how much nicer our world would be if every dad and mom demonstrated true responsibility for their offspring?

So I'll continue to try and make my kids' childhood as carefree and safe as possible. You can't always see it coming but I plan on giving it the old college try. I doubt I'll leave a large inheritance or a beach house to my children, but if they grow into secure, dependable citizens who value their families, this dad will have fulfilled his duty.



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
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