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Getting the Message

Effective, clear communication can mean the difference between a save and tragedy. This in-service training idea drives that point home to a generation of lifeguards more accustomed to texting than talking.

Teenagers and tweens text at mind-blowing rates. In fact, studies indicate the average teen sends or receives more than 3,300 text messages every month. With so much emphasis on digital contact, is this generation going to struggle with developing effective face-to-face communication skills?

It might be a little too early to say for certain, but it is not hard to imagine a world in which “Can’t wait to see you” is completely replaced by “Cant w8 2 c u.”

Rather than waiting for the inevitable,

aquatics professionals need to ensure that developing communication among guards is a major part of all in-service trainings.

After all, even with strong communication skills, conveying a message effectively can be difficult in the hustle and bustle of a standard lifeguard shift. In-water rescues are stressful and an obvious example of when being clear and concise is of the utmost importance. Guard rotations, on the other hand, often are easily dismissed, which is dangerous because they can be unexpectedly tricky.

Regardless of the circumstance or activity, lifeguards need to have a healthy appreciation for how important, and difficult, communication can be.

It is difficult to communicate effectively in stressful situations. This exercise has been designed to highlight that fact. Ironically, lifeguards will be playing an aquatic version of the game “Telephone.”

■ Create phrases the lifeguards will be required to remember. Sentences should be descriptive and relate to aquatic or lifesaving principles. Here are some examples:



■ Call EMS immediately. A 17-year-old girl experienced a seizure in the shallow end of the pool. She's unconscious.

■ The glare has been bad today. Positioning myself on the southeast end of the pool has helped.

■ A group of four teenagers came in 45 minutes ago. They're rowdy, and only one of them is a confident swimmer.

Write these phrases on slips of paper and place them in a hat, bag or similar container.

Separate lifeguards into competing groups. Each team should have four to 10 guards. They will be racing, so you may wish to spread the strongest swimmers evenly across teams.

The exercise

1 Inform the teams that they will be competing against each another. Besides swimming laps, each person also will be required to memorize a phrase and then accurately share the information with the next swimmer.

2 The first lifeguard on each team will select a phrase from the hat or bag, memorize it and then swim one lap. (Fitness is an important part of an effective in-service training. Feel free to require guards to swim more than one lap.)

3 The next lifeguard for each team will be at the starting point, waiting to receive the message from the previous guard. Once the guards are confident the message has been transmitted properly, the next guard will swim one lap.

4 For added difficulty, consider requiring the lifeguards to demonstrate proper CPR or another lifesaving technique before sharing the memorized phrase.

5 Repeat Step 3 until all lifeguards have completed the exercise.

6 Upon completing the lap, the last swimmer must recite the phrase word for word. The first team to accurately recite the phrase wins.

7 If the phrase was not communicated properly, the team must start the exercise over, beginning with the first lifeguard. All teams must complete the exercise. ■

GET MORE For a look at a video on effective communication, and more in-service training ideas, go to aquaticsintl.com

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