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FAMILIES

Someone to watch over me

From choking and drowning to scraped knees, babysitting courses teach caregivers what to do

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
Staff Writer

Caring for children is more than child's play, any veteran babysitter would be quick to point out.

All would agree: their worst nightmare is finding a toddler at the bottom of the pool, watching a baby turn blue from choking or discovering a three-year-old is nowhere in sight.

Emergencies sometimes happen, even to the best babysitter. The reality is, kids fall into water, choke and get lost.

The critical issue is knowing what to do in an emergency when you're in charge of someone else's children.

Jaclyn Mason, 14, came to her summer babysitting job in Stouffville prepared for just about anything.

Now, when she arrives to mind Daniel, 6, James, 4, and Katie, 3, their mother, Bernadette Merksamer, knows her children are in good hands.

In an emergency, Merksamer is confident Jaclyn will remain calm and do the right thing.

Two years ago, when Jaclyn was a Grade 6 student at St. Mark Catholic School, she took a babysitting course.

Under the direction of Consuela Tabone, of Stouffville, the course covered all the bases.

Using the Canadian Safety Council's child care course, Tabone taught Jaclyn and about 10 other students how to handle such life-threatening emergencies as a fire, an unconscious child or a stranger at the door.

On the other end of the scale, Jaclyn learned a cool anti-bacterial spray, Band-Aid and a kiss do wonders for a scraped knee.

She also knows a little extra attention at nap time will speed the healing a great deal. She didn't learn these things in the babysitting course.

Jaclyn remembers how, 10 years ago, her mother comforted her when she fell.

Parents need to know their children will be safe when in the hands of a babysitter.

In her first year of babysitting, Jaclyn also realized a child likes to talk about the injury. A smart babysitter listens.

When toddlers are near water, Jaclyn never takes her eyes off them, not for a second.

She learned the dangers of water from her parents and it was reinforced in Tabone's course.

"I teach the students never, under any circumstances, do you leave a child alone in or near a swimming pool," Tabone says.

In her course, Tabone stresses the hazards of poisons, who to call if a child has swallowed a toxic substance and what steps to take when a child is lost.

After taking the course, babysitters know when to call 911 and what to do while waiting for police, ambulance or the fire department to arrive.

Tabone has taught the school-

based babysitting course for 10 years.

The six-week course is offered to students 12 years and up during school lunch hour, beginning in late fall.

The curriculum is intense and the course includes an exam. If students don't cover the course properly or don't pass the examination, a

babysitting certificate is not issued.

More often than not, parents will ask a babysitting candidate if she is certified.

"Parents need to know their children will be safe when in the hands of a babysitter," Tabone says.

In addition to being versed in first aid, Jaclyn knows how to prepare healthy and appealing snacks

and meals for Daniel, James and Katie.

"Part of the course is preparing a menu," Tabone says.

When a child announces he wants mommy and he wants her now, Jaclyn doesn't bat an eye.

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STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

When Jaclyn Mason, 14, sits for Daniel, 6, James, 4, (not in photo) and Katie, 3, the children's mother knows they are in good hands.

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