




Table 3-1 Recognizing When a Person Needs Help

|                           | <b>Distressed Swimmer</b>                                                                                                                                              | <b>Drowning Victim—Active</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <b>Drowning Victim—Passive</b>                                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                           |                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Head position</b>      | Above water                                                                                                                                                            | Tilted back with face looking up                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Face-up or face-down in the water</li> <li>• Submerged</li> </ul>                                                                                           |
| <b>Appearance</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trying to support self by holding or clinging to a lane line or safety line</li> <li>• Concerned facial expression</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Struggling to keep or get the head above the surface of the water</li> <li>• Struggling to reach the surface, if underwater</li> <li>• Panicked or wide-eyed facial expression</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limp or convulsion-like movements</li> <li>• Floating or submerged</li> <li>• Eyes may be closed</li> <li>• If submerged, may look like a shadow</li> </ul> |
| <b>Breathing</b>          | Breathing                                                                                                                                                              | Struggling to breathe                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Not breathing                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Arm and leg action</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Floating, sculling or treading water</li> <li>• May wave for help</li> </ul>                                                  | Arms at sides or in front alternately moving up and pressing down                                                                                                                                                                  | None                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Body position</b>      | Horizontal, vertical or diagonal, depending on means of support                                                                                                        | Vertical, leaning slightly back                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Horizontal or vertical                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Locomotion</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little or no forward progress</li> <li>• Increasingly less able to support self</li> </ul>                                    | None                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | None                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Sounds</b>             | Able to call for help but may not do so                                                                                                                                | Cannot call for help                                                                                                                                                                                                               | None                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Location in water</b>  | At the surface                                                                                                                                                         | At the surface, underwater or sinking                                                                                                                                                                                              | Floating at the surface, sinking or submerged on the bottom                                                                                                                                          |

face above the water by pressing down with his arms at his sides or in front. However, the person's mouth may slip underwater, often repeatedly. Young children may tip forward into a horizontal face-down position and be unable to keep the mouth above the surface of the water at all. The person will not make any forward progress in the water, and may only be able to stay at the surface for 20–60 seconds, if at all. The person may continue to struggle underwater but eventually will lose consciousness and stop moving.

Some drowning victims are not at the surface when the problem occurs. For example, the person may slip into water over his head, incur an injury, or experience a sudden illness and struggle underwater to reach the surface. These drowning victims may look like they are playing or floating underwater. It may be difficult to recognize a drowning victim when the person is underwater.

### Drowning Victim—Passive

Some people who are drowning do not struggle. They suddenly slip underwater (for example, as a result of a sudden illness or injury or a dangerous behavior such as hyperventilation and prolonged underwater breath-holding). The use of alcohol or other drugs is also frequently a contributor to this type of drowning incident.

A person who is drowning but not struggling may be floating face-down at the surface of the water, or she may be underwater in a face-down or face-up position, or on her side. The person may be limp or have slight convulsive movements. The person is not moving or breathing. It can be difficult to see a drowning victim who is underwater, especially if the person is at the bottom of the pool or in a natural body of water where the water is murky. In a pool, the person may look like a shadow or an object like a towel on the bottom (**Fig. 3-3**).



**Fig. 3-3** A drowning victim who is underwater can be difficult to see. The person may look like a shadow, a smudge or an object like a towel.

### Distressed Swimmer

A distressed swimmer is someone who is not drowning, but needs help. A swimmer can become distressed for several reasons, including exhaustion, cramping or a sudden illness. A swimmer who is distressed may be afloat and able to breathe and call for help. However, you will notice that she is making little or no forward progress. She may be treading water or clinging to a line for support. A distressed swimmer may be unable to reach safety without assistance. Without help, a swimmer in distress may soon become a drowning victim.

## Responding to an Emergency

In an emergency, your role is to recognize the emergency, decide to act, call emergency medical services (EMS) personnel for help and give assistance consistent with your knowledge and training until EMS personnel arrive and take over (**Box 3-1**). If you work at an aquatic facility, you are a member of the safety team, which works to prepare for, prevent and respond to emergencies. As such, you are responsible for being familiar with the facility's emergency action plan, as well as your role in implementing it should an emergency occur.

### Deciding to Act

In an emergency, deciding to act is not always as simple as it sounds. People are often slow to act in an emergency because they are not exactly sure what to do or they think someone else will take action. In an emergency situation, your decision to act could make the difference between life or death for the person who needs help.