

Now I Know Better

BY CATHY CHURCH

I never earned my dive instructor certification because I've only ever wanted to teach photography, not scuba. I am, however, a Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) limited field specialty instructor. To be that, I needed to be a divemaster, which meant I had to get my rescue certification. Rescue was a class I very much wanted to do anyway, even though I had taken it unofficially many, many years ago and have actually rescued several divers in my 45 years of diving.

THE EVENT

I had a student who wanted to take an underwater photo class with me on my private photo boat, and she brought her son along. The son was a certified diver, but I knew that neither I nor his mother would be able to pay much attention to him while we were engaged in the photography class. So I assigned a dive instructor from my staff to be his buddy.

Toward the end of our dive I looked down and saw the son was deeper than we were. Since we were close to our time limit, I became concerned about the possibility he and the instructor were too deep and had been down too long. I got the instructor's attention and vehemently indicated that he should get the son back to the line for ascent.

I turned to my student and started toward the mooring line. I looked back just in time to watch her son do a rapid, uncontrolled ascent to the surface — he had forgotten to control his BC. I could not reach him, and the instructor wasn't able to get close enough to grab his fin. I saw the son slow his ascent, and I motioned for him to come down to us immediately. I wrote on my slate to the mother that we were going to have a problem. I told her to stay on the line with her son until I signaled for them to come up. The son joined us and signaled that he was OK, but I wanted to be ready.

I went up to the boat and set up my DAN® oxygen unit, but I had never used it before. I always have an instructor on board when I have students on my boat, and I have complacently depended on them to know how to use it. I was not at all happy with myself, and I lamented putting off taking an oxygen-provider class. Fortunately, the unit was already set up and just waiting to be turned on.



Don't be complacent or rely too heavily on other divers' skills. Learn to administer oxygen and basic first aid.

I brought up the instructor and then the mother and the son, and I had the instructor put the son on oxygen. It seemed simple enough, but I could not personally check to see if it was being done properly. I was lucky the son was able to breathe OK and had no symptoms, and I was lucky I was with another person who knew how to deliver the oxygen. As long as the young man was comfortable, we were OK. We cancelled the second dive and headed for the dock. The diver was feeling all right and got up momentarily to move so he went off oxygen briefly. That's when the symptoms started. He went back on oxygen until an ambulance could meet us at the dock. He was taken to the hospital, and after two Table 6 chamber treatments, he was fine.