

TEACHING SWIM BASICS

FOR PARENTS

Ideal Environment

This chapter is designed to introduce the parent and child to beginning water safety skills. First, the parent needs to find an ideal teaching environment like a heated swimming pool. An indoor pool allows one to schedule lessons in any kind of weather. It also prevents sunburn. Backyard pools cannot be used in bad weather but usually are more quiet and private. It is very pleasant being outdoors with your child in the sunshine. It is beneficial to practice in varied environments to improve your child's performance of water safety skills under real life conditions.

The water temperature should be about the same temperature as your child's bath water 89F (31C) in the summer and 92F (33C) in cooler weather. Newborns develop in the security and warmth of the uterus, where they lived in water that was 98.6F (37C). Infants and toddlers dislike and fear cold water. Do not force your child to learn in a chilly pool. You will be unable to teach effectively if he is crying, shivering and covered with goose bumps.

Tips for Learning

Your time in the pool can be more enjoyable if you remember the following suggestions. If your child is not potty trained, urine contamination cannot be prevented and is controlled by adequate chlorination. However, water contamination of fecal releases may be prevented by dressing your child in reusable swim diapers or swim suits with diaper linings. You may want to cover the diapers with a

bathing suit for an extra layer of protection. Make wearing a new bathing suit part of the fun of being in the water.

Safety Tips

Do not use any flotation devices. The greatest danger of these devices is your child will not realize the floaters are supporting him in the water. A flotation device gives a false sense of security to both parent and child. Your child may jump in the pool without it and expect to float. The shock he experiences when he submerges can cause him to panic and sink to the bottom. Your child needs a realistic perception of how his body relates to buoyancy while in the water. Most of these devices support the child in a vertical position, which is the “drowning position”. The ideal aquatic alignment is horizontal not vertical. Flotation devices make teaching balance, stability and aquatic alignment in the water much more difficult. Floaters prevent your child from learning a resting survival position in the water.

Never leave your child unattended around any body of water. Children can also drown in bathtubs, buckets and toilets. It only takes an inch of water to cause an accident. Be sure you have taught your child to stay away from water unless you are there. Even if he is able to execute the swim-float-swim sequence taught in Chapter 7, an accident might make it impossible for him to roll to his back or reach the side of the pool. As you teach your child in the pool, frequently remind him that he should never go near water unless Mommy and Daddy invite him in or near the water. We also recommend that every parent take a course in CPR and First Aid.

Motivating Your Child to Learn

Motivating your child to learn the skills necessary for water safety is key to this technique. It will help to tempt him with rewards for a job well done. Rewards are not bribes. Rewards are earned! The best rewards for a child are approval, love and fun.

If you make the lessons fun, your child will be more willing to do whatever you are requiring of him. In the beginning, you may have to spend the majority of the lesson playing to get your child to accept a few minutes of instruction. However, as he progresses, work on your skills at the beginning of the lesson and then reward him with play time at the end. Always allow enough time to play after the lesson. Spend time having fun and your child will be anxious to return to this exciting new activity of swimming.

However, when the exercises cease to be fun, your child will resist the learning experience. Don't give up. You may have to resume the lesson at another time. Before your next session, you need to find whatever motivates your child like a new toy, bucket with holes, new game, or different songs. Or have your child teach the skills to his favorite doll or action figure. A different time of day may also inspire your youngster to participate in the fun.

Another enticing motivation for your child is your approval and love. You are the most important person in his world. Your approval is very inspiring and encouraging. Shower your child with sincere praise for his progress, no matter how small. When the lesson is over and you are drying him with a towel, offer more hugs and approval. Tell Daddy and everyone what a terrific job he did in his lesson today. Whenever you can, applaud his progress.

Introduction to Submersion

Blowing bubbles in the swimming pool allows your child to interface with the water.

- Hold your child under his armpits facing you. Submerge your chin and lips so they are just below the surface of the water. Pretend you are blowing out a birthday candle as you demonstrate your bubbles. Have your child mimic your bubbles by blowing out his pretend candle.
- Or you can place a small plastic ball on the surface of the water, directly in front of your face. Submerge your chin and mouth, blow on the ping pong ball with strong puffs of air from your loosely closed lips. Your child will be delighted as he watches the ball scoot across the water. Next, let him blow the ball across the water by himself. Make sure he submerges his chin and mouth below the surface of the water. Tell your child to blow the ball with his lips. He may be so interested in this game he will forget his lips are in the water. This game will help your child recognize the importance of exhaling from his mouth while under water. After lots of practice, your child will be ready to submerge his face, nose and all.

Submersion to the Pool Steps

Condition your child to exhale when he hears the word bubbles.

- Say “bubbles” when you are showing your child how you submerge. Then, hold your child under the arm pits in a horizontal position, give him a gentle lift, say “Bubbles” and submerge his entire body to the pool steps where he can push down on the step and stand up. Have a fun toy, a ring, a bucket

waiting for him on the step to distract him. Shower him with praise. Enjoy a few moments of play time on the step and then practice this activity several times.

- If your child is fearful, you may have to glide him to the steps without submersion for several lessons before submerging him. When he shows more confidence, you can submerge him more often. Just relax and give him time to make the adjustment.

“Monkey Walk” at the Wall

One of the goals in water safety is to teach a child to propel himself to wall, grasp it for support, lift his head to breathe, hold on and climb out to safety. The grasping technique along with a “monkey walk” (hand-over- hand) should be taught before submerging your child to the wall.

- Hold him under his arm pits and glide your child in a horizontal position (without submersion) to the wall so he can grasp hold of it .
- Support him with your knee until he is able to hold on by himself. Repeat this activity several times. Each time he grasps the wall praise him.
- Then, guide him in a hand over hand sequence (“monkey walk”) to the steps to climb out. Place kickboards or toys on the side that he can knock them over as he goes. Your child will love this activity.

Submerge and Glide to the Wall

- Now your child is ready to glide underwater to the wall. Stand about 5 feet from the wall and face it. With your hands under his armpits gently lift your child, say bubbles and submerge him

in the direction of the wall. If he needs help slowly, gently give him a push to his buttocks so he can reach up and grasp the wall.

- Support him with your knee until he is able to hold on by himself. Guide him in a hand over hand sequence to the steps to climb out.
- Don't rush this step in your lesson. If your child is fearful, you may have to glide him to the wall without submersion for several lessons before submerging him. When he shows more confidence, you can submerge him more often. He will do it, just give him time.

Submitted by: Lana Whitehead, Owner of SwimKids, USA

The nationally recognized SWIMkids USA method is the result of 37 years of empirical research with over 50,000 swimmers. In 1971, Lana Whitehead began the development of this method. While employed as a special education high school teacher, the YMCA asked Lana to develop a swim program for babies. Her infant son Lance served as her guinea-pig. Ms. Whitehead later opened her own swim school in Arizona in 1973

