




UNHAPPY WATERBABIES

A PARENTING CHALLENGE




Thousands of little *waterbabies* have happily learnt to swim with Oceanic Waterbabies under the careful guidance of our wonderful teachers. Parents are able to share a close and positive bond with their children as they grow and learn together in the water.

Having spent around 9 months growing and developing in the watery womb, babies seem to have a natural affinity with water and their early bath tub connections reveal this natural attraction.

 Unfortunately, there are babies who aren't too sure and some even become stressed in the water, a sad sight given their natural inborn connection with water. To an observer, it is only a 30 minute weekly lesson and if they don't like it, then why go? At Waterbabies, we know the years of commitment to teach a baby to swim is likely to present at least one challenge for parents and for some, there could be several challenges.

As children mature through each stage of their emotional, mental and physical development, perceived problems, whatever they may be, are an important learning opportunity for parents. If you feel things have become too difficult and you are questioning whether to stop swimming, please ask your teacher for help and make every effort to resolve the challenge. Valuable skills can be learnt in the process which will only help with future challenges.

 To assist our swimming families during challenging times, we have information sheets on a range of relevant topics available at each venue. As classes run one after the other, there is not always an opportunity to speak in detail with your teacher so they have a message book that you can leave a note for them to contact you. We are here to help provide support to overcome whatever the challenge may be. You can also call our office for further information or to discuss your situation.

The following is known to influence why children may become upset in the water and can be a useful guide to bring about positive change.

1. UNRESOLVED BIRTH EXPERIENCE

- A difficult birth, whether it be prolonged labour, complications or obstetric surgery, can leave baby with unresolved physical and emotional trauma. Although the event may be long over, unresolved features of the trauma are stored in the central nervous system and in cellular memory. It only takes a similar image or sensation to reactivate emotions and body memory. Pay close attention to your baby's body language, facial expressions and sounds to help you to tune into what may be surfacing in the water.
- The healing properties of warm water create an ideal environment for strengthening the bond between parent and baby and help to release unresolved feelings and trauma. Whatever comes to the surface is ok and it is important to allow your baby to freely express how they feel.
- Your teacher is there to support you and also provide information that may assist with clearing unresolved birth trauma. There are many well researched healing modalities including Chiropractic, Osteopathy, Physiotherapy, Kinesiology and more. General information on these are available through the office and we also provide practitioner recommendations.

2. TRANSFERRED ANXIETY

- When feeling anxious in the water, it is likely that over time, some degree of this anxiety may be transferred to the baby. For example, being late for class can trigger a child to feel unsettled which can affect participation on many levels, including submersion. When we feel anxious, we cannot be fully present and tuned into our children.
- Transferred anxiety from parent to child can lead to a cycle developing where the baby reacts to their parents anxiety and the parent reacts to their child's distress or expected distress and so the cycle is perpetuated. This can be inaccurately labelled as "*my baby doesn't like water*".
- When a parent recognises and acknowledges their own feelings are impacting their child, it becomes an opportunity to be present, breathe and focus on a deeper more pleasurable connection with their baby.

3. PLAY SWIMMING - HELP OR HINDRANCE?

- During our break between terms, play swimming is a fantastic way to consolidate skills, build stamina, fitness and enhance the bond between parent and child.
- On the flip side, play swimming can also create problems if some basic rules are not followed. For best results when play swimming with your child outside of class, please take a copy of *Play Swimming Guidelines*, appropriate to your child's stage of swimming from your venue.

4. MISHAPS, CARELESS HANDLING & BROKEN TRUST

These questions may provide insight into recent changes to your child's behaviour in the pool-

- Is there any history of mistimed submersion in class or during play swimming and at what age?
- Has there been a recent mishap or significant event in the water (in or out of class) that has or may have frightened your child?
- If so, were you there and how did *you* react at the time? *Or* was someone else with your child and how did they react? Was there a noticeable change in your child's behaviour at class following the incident?
- Has the incident been openly discussed with your child and time given to work through their feelings?



A traumatic event in or around water can result in anxiety and fear for some children. Memory and feelings do not just disappear overnight and the child may need help to clear these unresolved feelings. Talk about the incident *with* your child and if they are old enough, encourage expression of how they feel/felt.

Talk with your teacher for options how to help work through the issue. Dream talking can also be very effective, pick up the information sheet at your venue.

Confident handling skills are essential as is honouring your child's body language. Working in opposition, such as pushing to participate, can fracture the bond of trust. If this becomes the main way of interacting in the water, then children will learn to associate swimming with feeling anxious and unsafe. This will inevitably result in protest, clinginess and fear. Do it ***with your child***, not to them!

5. CHANGE

Whether there are changes happening with your child's development, daily routine or other influences that may have nothing to do with swimming, how they cope with change is often reflected in how they behave in water. Water amplifies what is emotionally or energetically suppressed, so a deeper look below the surface as it may reveal a different picture to work with.

• **Things to consider-**

- Are sleep times clashing with your class time?
- Are you moving house?
- Have you changed your child's sleeping environment such as moving from their cot into a new bed?
- Has there been any social challenges such as going to daycare, kindy or meeting family or new people?
- Has there been a visit or stay in hospital? We have seen that when children experience for example, separation, tests, strangers and sometimes painful procedures, all of these can have a huge impact on how safe the child feels and impacts trust in the pool seen as clinginess and refusal to participate.



• **A new pregnancy** can trigger a clingy phase, emotional sensitivity or a reluctance to participate in activities. There have been times when mum is not aware of her new pregnancy but the child senses something has changed and displays the signs. When within a few days or weeks, the pregnancy is confirmed, parents often see the coinciding events and make the connection.

Many children move quickly through this phase once their feelings are acknowledged and the new baby is discussed. Children are also much happier to join in if mum does everything *together*, including submersion.

- **Has submersion become an issue** but previously they were fine? Is your child at the stage of needing goggles or could they have entered a Learning Plateau? Information sheets available at your venue.
- **Change in the parent swimming:** If parents or carer are going to swap teaching roles (either at class or at home) then time must be given to help the child adjust to the change. Children can react very differently to each parent in the water and therefore an efficient handover between parents is necessary to minimize any negative impact. Call the office if you are thinking of a change and we will explain the best way to go about it.
- **Expectations:** Check in with your expectations around what you think your child *should be* doing and how this makes you feel; i.e. frustrated, embarrassed, anxious or upset? Consciously attend to your feelings, as verbally expressed or not, your child can feel your stress. Remember, children listen to what you say both directly to them and what they hear you say about them in their presence... so keep it positive!

If swimming with your child was once a joyful experience but has become an unhappy event, then rest assured, there is a way to get back on track. Waterbabies teachers are well trained to deal with both the expected challenges and the unexpected. We ask that you be willing to hold the possibility for positive change and approach each lesson with as much joy as you can.

Oceanic Waterbabies is dedicated to the ongoing education, well-being and health of the parent, child and family relationship



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