

# PLAY SWIMMING GUIDELINES

## STAGE 1-3 BABIES



*Play is learning and Learning is play*

The more you swim the more confident you will become and even one extra swim a week can bring positive results and lead toward skill mastery. Play swimming helps to:

- Improve your child's overall fitness, stamina and strength in the water.
- Increase your child's lung capacity and improve breathing rhythms for submersion.
- Improve parent confidence handling and technique, especially when it comes to submersion.
- Strengthen the bond between parent and child through enjoyable, quality time together.
- Develop a positive aquatic association and assist reconnecting with the water after time off.
- Improve skills learnt in the program, boosting your child's confidence and independence.

Having now completed between 1-3 terms of swimming with many new skills learnt, you are well on your way to deepening the connection with your baby in the aquatic environment. As lung capacity, physical mobility and trust develops, it is important to continue swimming through the term break.

Be mindful that how *you* feel in the water is transferred to your baby, so enjoy yourself, be relaxed and be present. With positive interaction and correct, consistent technique, repetition of the skills you have learnt will be reinforced and hardwired. Below is a guide of techniques and skills you have learnt in class that you can build on during the holiday period;

### HOME BATH

- Bath temperature is best to be tepid and not too hot. This will help baby to adjust to cooler temperatures which will help when transitioning to the cooler swimming pool over summer.
- Bath together as often as you can to reinforce the three way bond with you, your baby and water. Combine welcome & warm up songs, splashing, playing and nurturing.
- Cup Pouring- Continue to coordinate timing with 1<sup>st</sup> breath reflex cue and pouring water over baby's face. Praise and smile after each repetition. Remember cups should not be left for baby to play with and drink from in the bath. Ever so quickly we can see this negative habit develop into drinking the pool water.

### AT THE POOL

- If the water temperature is cooler, stimulate baby's skin with massage/ gentle rubbing before getting in and once in, keep baby swishing and moving.
- **Safe entry/exit-** Each aquatic facility is different so take the time with your child to familiarise yourself with pool layout and water depth and relevant safety regulations.
- **Free hold-** Use this safe and comfortable hold to support baby without restricting their movement.
- **Warm up song-** A great way to start your play swim. Go through holds and actions, splash and cup pour water over bub's head with the cue you are using to prepare for submersion.
- **Side Hold-** This hold helps you to establish eye contact and observe baby's body language before progressing to dipping. Keep your shoulder in front to let your baby know you are right there as you blow bubbles around the pool.
- **Song:** *Wheels on the Bus* is a fun activity combining important handling skills.
- **Foot soccer-** Another activity to develop coordination and to hardwire "kicking". Use word association "Kick, Kick" and do the action with bubs legs.
- **Floating -** Breathe and let go of any tension you are feeling. Full floating should only be done if baby is receptive, if they fuss or become upset then move into the half float position. Resistance could indicate that the righting reflex may have emerged or they could be feeling tension or anxiety transferred from you. Keep a check on how you feel with floating and any other skills you do.  
Use one hand to gently cup the base of baby's head just above the neck and place two fingers under baby's chin to stabilize their head. Baby's ears should be underwater. .. sing "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" to relax yourself and baby. Float for as long as your baby is receptive.

## SUBMERSION

- If you are comfortable with dipping in class then continue working with technique, body language and building lung capacity with your baby. Quality dips are far more important than quantity, so establish good eye contact, breathe and remain relaxed so your baby can feel your positive vibes.
- **Breathing cue-** If you are still using the first breath cue when term finishes, be aware your baby's development changes quickly and they may begin to anticipate the cue, so tune in and shorten/adapt to suit. If you have weaned your baby from the first breath reflex in class, continue to work with audible inhale and lift together.
- Commit to each dip, aim for full head submersion as bub is ready and use your knees for a gentle, smooth entry & exit from the water. Be mindful to avoid fast, splashy dips. Make eye contact and give positive feedback to your baby after each dip.
- **Stage 1 progress** - Remember all dips are stationary so "glue your feet to the floor" and refine your technique through the holiday break until you return to class and progress with new techniques.
- **Stage 2 & 3 progress** - You have progressed to moving dips in the Side Hold and for some, you will be releasing. Wall entry dips must be hands on your baby, horizontal tummy first entry, keeping your shoulder in front to maintain eye contact and let them know you are right there.

## PLAY SWIMMING PROBLEMS

During term breaks, play swimming problems can develop leaving parents to face challenges with their children when classes resume. Issues will vary according to the age and stage of development.

### Shallow water paddle pool play

- Too much play in shallow water with **little or no activities** in deeper water as you would normally do in class, can create struggles when returning to structure and deeper water. When overused, the child learns that standing means "I am in control".
- Although this can be seen as a positive form of independence, returning to structured lessons may bring up issues such as power struggles, resisting being held and refusing to participate instead wanting the steps, platform or to get out of the pool where they can reclaim control.
- After spending quality swimming time together **at the end** of your swim, encourage independent exploration and some playtime in shallow water. But stay vigilant and make sure they are safe

### Floatation devices... help or hindrance?

Our experience of over 26 years working both with and without floatation devices, has shown the best floatation device is actually you, the parent. Overall we discourage floatation devices for these reasons;

- Wearing a floatation device can be a distressing experience for some children as the physical disconnection from their parent in the water creates separation anxiety.
- Putting on or pulling off restrictive devices over the head and upper body can be stressful for some.
- Floatation devices place the body in an unnatural position, restricts movement and submersion. Adult support may still be required to help with balance and maintaining an upright position.
- Overuse and reliance of float devices leads to a false sense of buoyancy and undermines confidence when they are not wearing them.
- Too often floatation devices are used as a replacement for supervision and can compromise a child's safety as they are NOT lifesaving devices as clearly and wisely stated on the product. Although rare, they can deflate and put the child in danger.
- On a positive note, when used wisely appropriate devices that are non-restrictive as possible (such as arm bands) can help children initiate their own movement and balance in the water promoting independence and confidence. To gain maximum benefit, use at the end of a play session for about 5-10 minutes only.

### **REMEMBER NOTHING REPLACES CONSTANT, CONSISTENT, SUPERVISION**

These guidelines do not mean compromising enjoyment for "getting it right" or making your child participate if there is resistance. You are your child's teacher, so combine your natural parenting wisdom with the guidance from our program and happily explore the water together.

**HAPPY SWIMMING**

*Kelly Rae ©*

*Oceanic Waterbabies*