

PLAY SWIMMING GUIDELINES

STAGE 4 ONWARDS



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.

PROBLEMS ARISING FROM PLAY SWIMMING

During term breaks, play swimming can lead to fantastic improvement or lead to parents facing issues with their children when term resumes. Issues will vary according to the age & development stage of each child.

1. Shallow water paddle pool play

Regular play in shallow wading water with **little or no activities** in deeper water (as you would normally do in class) can create enormous struggles when returning to structure in deeper water. Paddle pool play places the child into a situation where being able to stand means having control and the freedom to mostly do what they want.

Although this can be seen as a form of independence, returning to structured lessons may bring difficulty understanding (depending on age and stage) why they cannot continue to do as they please. Issues here include power struggles, not wanting to be held or refusing to participate in activities with a preference to wanting the steps, platform or anywhere they can reclaim control. Too much wading in shallow water can create anxiety and clinginess when going back to deep water lessons. Memory of skills not practiced over the break diminish along with lung capacity, stamina and the desire to participate.

2. Bad habits

Repetition of anything will hard wire the brain, so we encourage positive interaction and correct, consistent technical handling from parents. Avoid bad habits from developing such as drinking pool water or bath water, incorrect skills (splinter skills) and dangerous behaviour such as unsafe/unassisted water entry.

3. 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.

SUCCESSFUL PLAY SWIMMING

CHECK YOUR SURROUNDINGS

- Each aquatic facility will be different so take time with your child to familiarise the swimming area you visit. **Read signs** at the pool or beach as they give important information about safety.
- At the pool locate water depth markers to determine safe entry points at steps, ladders and ramps, shallow and deep water areas, including diving pools and diving boards.
- Watch for sloping floors in the water, especially those that drop off with a steep gradient.
- Check deck height from the waters surface, including starting blocks. Level decking is very user friendly but check there are no gaps or breaks in the level decking grate. Locate stainless steel rails or ledges and where they start and finish below the surface.
- Locate water outlets, lights or other accessories (these can frighten some children).
- At the beach, check for safety flags to swim between, know where rips, banks and other possible hazards are before entering the water.

GUIDELINES

- During your Waterbabies lesson, pay careful attention to your teacher's instruction. Technical details are important and can make the difference between skills done correctly or causing stress to your child or developing bad habits.
- Make your way to deeper water (comfortable standing depth) and begin with skills and activities you have learnt in class and are comfortable with. Include skills and activities to reinforce safety aspects of swimming. Repeat skills a few times, or as many times as your child is receptive and refine your techniques and give positive encouragement as you go. **MAKE IT FUN!**
- Gently challenge lung capacity and swimming distance to develop stamina and strength. If your child displays clinginess or uncertainty, take your time and go under together when submerging to strengthen trust and build confidence.
- Make sure safety comes first and supervise vigilantly around all places of water. Keep your boundaries firm to support a healthy understanding and awareness of safety, self and others.
- After spending quality swimming time together **at the end** of your swim, encourage independent exploration and some playtime in shallow water. Playing in shallow water, going under and learning to recover and bring head and body to standing are all important skills too. Stay vigilant when your child is in shallow water and make sure they are safe.

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