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The Importance of Water Familiarisation

By
Laurie Lawrence

This book explores water familiarisation and why teachers must implement it to ensure that children feel relaxed and comfortable in the water. It explains that water familiarisation is essential before structured teaching and learning can take place. This ebook will take teachers through the process of water familiarisation so that they can feel confident when teaching beginner swimmers.



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INTRODUCTION TO WATER FAMILIARISATION

Making children feel relaxed and comfortable in the water is essential before structured teaching and learning can take place. Apprehensive or frightened children will naturally have a serious barrier to learning. In many cases they will not even attempt some of the simplest learn to swim activities.

Therefore, teachers should spend time establishing a comfortable and secure learning environment for their pupils. This acclimatising period is often referred to as water familiarisation and is best done in a fun way in shallow water. Simple activities such as lying on their back in very shallow water with the ears submerged or rolling over kicking fast with lots of splashing without even putting the face under are two very simple water acclimatisation exercises.

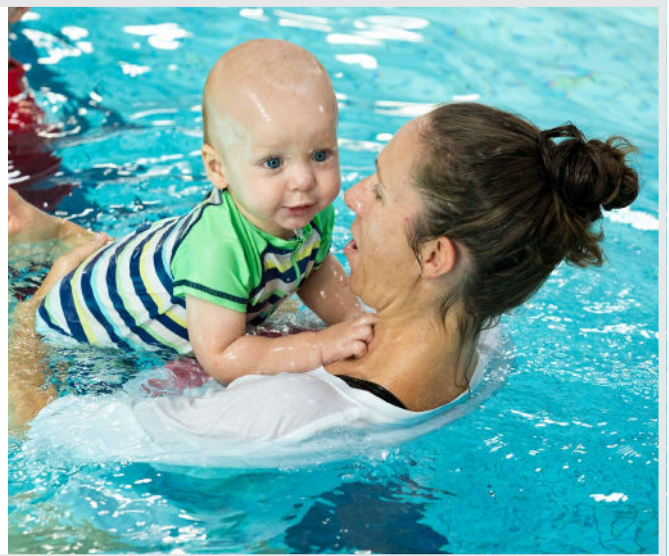


TEACHING BEGINNER SWIMMERS

Beginner swimmers are more often than not frightened of the water. The parent or caregiver may have unintentionally frightened the child in their attempts to keep them safer around the water. For example by simply saying, "Come back from the side of the pool you'll hurt yourself," or "Don't go near the pool its deep," will be ingrained into the child's psyche and often is remembered by the child as they go to participate in their first swimming lesson.

If children have not been regularly exposed to the water around 2 years of age or older, they may show signs of discomfort, apprehension or fear. It will not be easy to condition these children for submersion as we do with young babies. These children must be handled quite differently and must initiate their own submersions.

They must never be forced underwater for any reason whatsoever.



With practical teaching experience, swimming teachers will soon be able to observe and recognise these fears. The children's tell-tale body language will alert the teacher they will be able to identify common characteristics of a frightened beginner.

Signs of Apprehension:

- » Shivering or shaking, even in warm water
- » Shutting the eyes and holding the breath
- » Clenching fists, shrugging shoulders and observed body tension
- » Frequent talking or even crying
- » Pulling back as soon as the teacher goes to touch them.
- » Arching their back if the teacher tries to support them

“Swimming teachers should be aware that child's early experiences in the water will determine their future attitudes. For this reason we should aim to make these early learning experiences positive, safe and pleasurable in an attempt to shape a love of the water that children will carry with them through to adulthood.”

Force has no place in the teaching of swimming. Teachers need to find fun ways to encourage children to perform swimming activities voluntarily.

SHALLOW WATER ORIENTATION

Before learning can take place children must feel comfortable. Having shallow water is fantastic for teaching beginners. In fact, for frightened beginners shallow water is vital. It allows the child to feel and be in control as they practice basic water familiarisation activities such as walking, jumping, splashing and attempting breath control activities like pouring water over their face or even attempting self-submerging.

Shallow water not only makes children feel in control but fosters the child's independence in the water. This will allow the teacher to teach with a "hands off" approach building more and more independence and confidence in the child.

There will be no need for the teacher to handle the frightened beginner in the early learning stages the child will be able to initiate their own water familiarisation activities with encouragement from the teacher. Experienced teachers will find that the child becomes relaxed much sooner.



DEEP WATER ORIENTATION

During deep water orientation teachers must be extremely vigilant to ensure the safety of their class.

Drowning is a silent killer and there have been reported instances of a child actually drowning during supervised swimming lessons. During deep water activities teachers should call on the parents to provide that extra pair of eyes to help with supervision. This type of parental involvement will build a good rapport with parent and child alike.

Ensuring maximum practice time in deep water with beginners can be difficult. Teachers often fall into the trap of taking students one at a time while others wait for their turn. The innovative teacher will come up with ways to keep their class moving. First trips to deep water may be as simple as having the class hold the side of the pool and all submerge together. As the children feel their own buoyancy they will rapidly grow in confidence. If the children are kept busy and active they will progress sooner and the teacher will avoid behavioural distractions in the class.



TIPS FOR MAXIMISING DEEP WATER PRACTICE TIME

Once the teacher see the students' confidence growing, they may set up a deep water follow the leader circuit. This can help to generate maximum practice time during the lesson.

Teachers should look to utilise teaching benches, ledges, deck level pool edge, rails or ramps depending on what is available at your swim school.

“ Lesson planning is the key when teaching beginners in deep water. ”



ENSURING SAFETY FOR BEGINNER SWIMMERS

Having a defined class area which is roped off is important for the safety of your class.

This will ensure that you can keep your group together and avoid students wandering outside of your supervision. It is not necessary to have a large teaching space particular with beginner students or when taking inexperienced swimmers into deep water. Experienced teachers will set up a confined area which gives them good supervision of the class and the ability to move easily and quickly if they need to respond to their student in trouble.

Teachers must have all of their teaching equipment on hand. If this is done there will be no need to leave students to get teaching equipment. Should the teacher, for some reason, need to leave the water all their students must go with them.

Young children must never be left unsupervised in and around water and certainly not in a supervised teaching class.



TEACHING BASIC SKILLS

It is important that teachers don't rush the water familiarisation stage with students.

Basic skills like pool entry and exit, breath control, submersion and floating skills are all vital to a child's progressive learning.

Swimming teachers often observe those children who struggle, thrash, and fight the water have difficulty keeping themselves afloat.

These simple floating skills, established early, will form the child's base for learning to swim and stroke development. It must be mastered before trying more complex swimming skills. If children learn to relax and float independently on their front and back for up to ten seconds, once propulsive patterns are introduced a more relaxed stroke will be developed.



FROM FLOATING TO STROKE DEVELOPMENT

We as teachers must remember the importance of progressively building swimming skills to develop a relaxed and natural stroke which will last a lifetime.

Good stroke develop requires perfecting a perfect streamline body position. Teachers are reminded that this position in the early learning stages is not very stable for beginners. Beginners may need to perfect their balance and body position in the water by floating with a kickboard then floating with a wider arm position to assist in buoyancy before building more streamline position.

“ Remember, floating is the basis of all learn-to-swim and should be a consistent part of any lesson plan. ”



DEVELOPING TRUST WITH BEGINNERS

Developing trust is the key with beginners. Teachers should always follow through with things that they tell their students.

A perfect example of this which we often observe is: A teacher or parent, in deep water, tells the child, “Swim out to me, I won’t move.” Unfortunately, as soon as the child strikes out, the teacher or parent immediately moves backwards extending the child before they are ready. This very often destroys the child’s confidence and progress.

Once you develop trust with your beginner swimmers they will progress quickly.



TOP TIP:

Children are often reluctant to swim to an adult. This can sometimes be remedied by having the child swim to the pool’s edge or a ledge.

They are more relaxed swimming to a solid object because they know it won’t move.

ENSURING PROGRESS IN YOUR BEGINNERS

- » Commit to your swimming lessons
 - Frequently changing teachers can be detrimental to beginner swimmers. Just as they gain trust in one teacher, another is introduced to them.
- » Maintain an ideal water temperature
 - If it is within your power, maintaining a water temperature of 30-32 degrees Celsius is ideal for beginners
 - Teachers who do not have access to heated pools may have to begin the lesson with land drills or water safety activities to break up the duration of time in the water
- » Plan lessons that keep your students busy and active so that they don’t get too cold in the pool
 - Beginner swimmers often feel the cold sooner than those students who are able to swim as they are less active
- » Use routines and familiar surrounds & situations
 - Following a similar lesson plan from week to week while gradually building on skills will help to progress students faster



» Grouping children according to their ability

- This will help with the smooth running of the class, and allows the teacher to:
 1. Give equal attention to all students
 2. Control a smoother, better balanced class catering to the students 'needs
 3. Plan a lesson that is suitable for all
 4. Give maximum practice time in the lesson, and
 5. Avoid behavioural problems
- If there are instances where children need to be moved to a more appropriate class, teachers should be discreet and not create a situation which may be difficult for administration. Speaking with the deck supervisor or administration prior to notifying the parent is always recommended.

The most powerful tool a teacher has in their arsenal is positive reinforcement. Giving genuine praise for attempts and triumphs will keep children interested in the lesson and want them to continue to improve. If a child is struggling with a more difficult skill, ask them to perform something simple that you know they can do and then praise their work. This will help to build confidence and make them willing to try again on a more difficult task.



“ Remember teachers influence their students; make sure that you influence them in a positive way so that you influence a child's love of and enjoyment of the water. Your expertise will influence a child for life. ”



PARENTS' ROLE IN WATER FAMILIARISATION

Parents must understand the important role they play in helping their child learn to swim.

Teachers should encourage parents to take their child to the pool for exploratory play outside of the swimming lesson, but always, under strict supervision.

Exposing children to a variety of different situations and depths of water is crucial for children to learn their capabilities and boundaries. Exploratory learning in particular is vital for frightened beginners. The more exposure children get to the water the more relaxed and confident they will become.

Parents will also see a faster progression for their child if they are given an opportunity to play in the water outside of the lessons and therefore they often perceive the lesson to be more “value” for money. They must become willing partners in their child’s swimming progress.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

World Wide Swim School has received a variety of questions relating to beginner swimmers and water familiarisation. We have compiled a list of 5 popular questions to share with you to assist in delivering these lessons.

1 What activities should I used with first time swimmers?

- » Entries and exits in different areas of the pool
- » Walking, running and jumping in shallow water
- » Monkey or hand walking along the side of the pool
- » Pouring water over the face using cups and watering cans
- » Playing “ring a Rosie” and the class submerge together
- » Floating front and back with a board
- » Front and back floating for 10 seconds without a board
- » Teaching children to independently recover from a floating positing



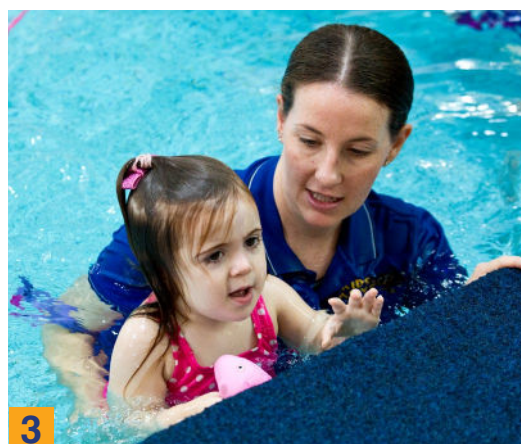
2 What equipment might aid the child's learning?

- » Plastic cups and watering cans
- » Kickboards and noodles
- » Floating mats
- » Diving rings



3 How would you ensure maximum practice time for beginners?

- » Inspect the teaching location
- » Use follow the leader or wave formation
- » Select an area of the pool that could assist in teaching the class e.g. ramp
- » Identify teaching equipment that will assist delivery e.g. noodle, mat
- » Plan the lesson remember to build swimming skills progressively
- » Utilise circuits and teach children to follow the leader
- » Identify class rules and expectations
- » Review your lesson after your shift to adjust requirements for the following week





4 How would you encourage children to put their face underwater?

- » Start with pouring water over the ears, back of the neck and shoulders building towards pouring water over the face
- » Encourage students to pour water over their own face and allow them to pour water over you, the teacher's, face
- » Get children to put their ear underwater, lips, nose, eye brows and of course the full face
- » Use teacher and other classmates to demonstrate
- » Teach children to hold their breath first, before introducing bubbles
- » Use fun games like picking up rings to encourage children to put their face underwater
- » Never force or hold a child's face underwater
- » Have them lie on their back in shallow water, ears submerged.



5 What sort of safety rules should I establish with my students?

- » Make sure children learn to walk around the pool, not to dive into shallow water
- » Teach children how to get in and out of the pool safely
- » Make sure children learn to look and listen while you are talking
- » It may be easier to have children sit outside of the pool while giving explanations
- » Always use simple instructions
- » Teacher personal safety rules like swimming with a buddy
- » Teach basic rescue skills like sending for help, throwing an object or reaching with an object and not putting yourself in danger



WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Swim Schools and their teachers can benefit from ongoing professional development content through Laurie Lawrence's Swim School Hub.

The Swim School Hub is an online and interactive training program, that has been developed using the philosophies and teaching practices of Laurie Lawrence to benefit swim schools and their teachers. The Hub demonstrates your commitment to continual professional development and ensures school and teacher 5-star ratings are maintained, whilst also meeting all industry compliance requirements.

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