

Coach Caroline's Corner

Swimming Skills

*Listed below is information and swimming skills that your child can practice at home.

IMPORTANT: Parent must be present at all times. These skills should never be done while your child is alone in the bathtub.

Verbal Cues

Verbal cues are very important to alert your swimmer to a change in activity. This is especially important when preparing to go underwater, as with bobs or jumping in. Counting or saying "Ready, Set, Go" are excellent ways to verbally prepare your child. Verbal cues also keep young swimmers safe. Learning to wait for a signal before jumping in helps prevent unexpected entries into the water. You can practice the basics with a game of red light, green light or putting your swim in charge of the situation, and you become the "good listener".

Kicking

Practicing kicks without the pool can be fun! Little ones can practice in the tub, lying on their front or back. Older swimmers can lay on the edge of the bed, practicing kicking in the air. Wherever they are, make sure they keep their legs straight but flexible with toes pointed, making little splashes. Kicking should come from the hip, using the entire leg-no bicycle kicks!

Will It Float?

Have your child select a few items from around the house for bath time and have them guess if they will sink or float. If you use kitchen items you can also pretend to make food as an added bonus. You should really try an orange: Does it float or sink? Peel the orange and try again: What is different? The peel of the orange is like a lifejacket for your swimmers. When you get back at the pool, you can also look for what things might float (Hint: PFDs, lifeguard tube, rescue ring).

Deep Dive

The tub can be a great place for your child to explore opening their eyes under water. Have a few prizes you can drop to the bottom of the tub and have your swimmer look under the water to try to find them. Want to add a challenge to the skill: Fill the tub with bubble bath. This is a great way for your child to try out a pair of goggles, if you have them.

Splashing

Gently introducing your young swimmer to water is imperative to having a good relationship with it. Turn this introduction into play time! Using a colander, watering can or a paper cup with holes punched in it, sprinkle water over their head while in the tub. Smile and laugh while doing this, so they associate this activity with positivity. Teach them to wipe their eyes with their hands after getting wet. Progress to poring cups of water over their head and having them wipe their eyes afterwards. This activity will prepare them for their next step, submersions!

Bubbles

Practice blowing bubbles underwater. Start out with teaching your child how to "blow out candles", then when they are able to breath out through their mouth, have them try this with their nose. To do nose bubbles, encourage your child to hum and breathe out as they put their nose underwater. If they want a challenge, count how many seconds they can make bubbles!

Water Hokey Pokey

For very young children, acclimate them to water by playing a game of Water Hokey Pokey. Encourage them to put their chin, ears, mouth, and back of their head in the water. Ex: "We put our right hand in, we take our right hand out..."

Submerging

Submerging is an important skill in learning to swim. Not approaching this properly can cause unnecessary fear to be associated with this fundamental skill. Start slow, by putting different parts of the face in the water. Begin with dipping the chin in the water, then move to covering the mouth with water. Next, have them move their head so they can look directly at the bottom, then dip nose in water. Continue this with eyebrows and forehead. Finally, dip entire face in the water. All of this should be done under the child's own power, so they are controlling the activity. With this method, water avoids going up the nose and scaring the child from going underwater again.

Backfloats

Back floats can be challenging! Often, young swimmers do not like the feeling of water in their ears. They will become better with practice once they become more desensitized to the feeling. The bathtub is a great place to get in this practice because of the shallow floor. You can start, just like in the pool, with a hand under the head and back. Help your swimmer practice taking slow breath, getting relaxed, and even tipping their head back with a high chin. They will slowly become more independent, and you can add a little more water to the tub to float higher.