

## TEACHING YOUNG CHILDREN SUBMERSION SKILLS

Teaching young children water submersion and breath-holding skills serves a crucial purpose: equipping them with the necessary abilities to survive unexpected falls into the water and providing valuable time for retrieval. It's essential to recognize that breath-holding is a learned skill rather than instinctive, yet young children readily grasp it once taught.

As children under five primarily swim underwater, they naturally develop coordination and strength to learn strokes, quickly adopting a breathing rhythm. A swimmer proficient in surface and underwater skills is better prepared to master various aquatic sports techniques.

Introducing submersion and breath-holding techniques at the outset of swimming lessons not only enhances the safety of young children in and around water but also increases their confidence and proficiency in swimming as they grow.

Floating on the back is a crucial survival skill, especially when combined with breath control and confidence in submerging. Many programs use a sequence of skills, such as forward rolls or back sit falls, followed by submersion and transitioning to back float. Teaching these skills demands patience, but the results are invaluable. It's crucial to remember that while these skills are beneficial, no child is drown-proof; attentive supervision is paramount for safety.

The approach to introducing submersion and breath-holding skills varies for each age group, ensuring effective and age-appropriate instruction:

- Infants (3-12 months) respond well to action and reaction methods that engage their natural reflexes and responses to water.
- Toddlers (approximately 1-3 years) benefit from exploration and imitating movement in a supportive environment where verbal and non-verbal language improves.
- Little swimmers (3-5 years) thrive with a hands-off approach, learning best through guided discovery, allowing them to develop skills at their own pace.

It's essential to introduce submersion skills gently and gradually, avoiding forced dunking. The process should be comfortable and enjoyable for both parent and child, ensuring the child is ready and willing to participate.

Maintaining a calm and incremental approach is crucial during submersion activities to prevent frightening the child and hindering their progress. Using consistent cues like "one-two-three" for all submersion activities aids in anticipation and comfort. Once comfortable, introduce sudden, unexpected submersion tasks, like forward rolls or back fall-ins.

To prevent overwhelming the child, refrain from repeating specific submersion activities excessively. Instead, gradually reinforce skills over multiple sessions, ensuring each lesson is enjoyable, encouraging, and confidence-building.

Remember, teaching water submersion skills aims to empower children with life-saving abilities while creating positive experiences around water, which is essential for all water-related activities and sports.