



## **Baby Swimming Policy**

To ensure babies and pre-school children are introduced to the aquatic environment in a safe and positive manner, Swordfish Swim have produced this baby swimming policy. The policy offers guidance and best practice guidelines on the following areas:

1. Starting Baby Swimming
2. The Pool Environment
3. Teaching Methodology
4. Submersions.

### **Starting Baby Swimming**

The policy of Swordfish Swim, with regards to introducing babies to aquatic activities is as follows:

- Babies should only be introduced to water in line with the most recent recommendations from the Department of Health. The current recommendation at the date of publication is that your baby does not need any immunisations before they go swimming and you can take your baby swimming at any time before and after their immunisations
- A teacher should ensure that a midwife, a health visitor or a doctor is happy for the baby and new mother to be introduced to a public swimming pool. A signed statement

by a parent/guardian provides some assurance that it is appropriate to introduce the child to the aquatic environment. This will be done via the sign up process whereby parents/carers will be asked the question.

- Teachers need to be aware that the immune system of babies born prematurely does not develop at the same pace as that of full term babies.
- Babies aged 0-3 months are highly sensitive to sensory stimulation. Their introduction to public pools at this time requires special skills from a baby and pre-school swimming teacher to lower the risk of age-inappropriate stimulation that can be damaging in the short or long term. Therefore, Swordfish Swim will not take any babies under 6 months old.

## **Pool Environment**

With no set earliest date for introducing babies to a pool, the quality of the water and the pool environment are critical for the health and safety of very young babies (0 to 3 months):

- The water and air temperature must be higher than for normal public swimming; at least 30°C (32°C for babies under 3 months old or weighing less than 5.5kg/12lbs)
- Babies and toddlers who are not toilet trained should wear specialised waterproof nappies to prevent leakage as much as possible. Parents should be made aware of site specific pool policies.
- Teachers should ensure the water quality and clarity is within the recommended guidelines and the pool is well managed and maintained
- Teachers are expected to be familiar with the NOP and EAP for every pool they deliver lessons at.

## **Teaching Methodology**

The introduction of babies and pre-schoolers to water must be very careful and gentle in order to prevent long-term fear of water being developed.

- The teaching of babies and pre-school children should only be undertaken by holders of a suitable specialist baby and pre-school teaching certificate such as the STA Award in Aquatic Teaching – Baby and Pre-School
- Teachers should hold a recognised lifesaving qualification which includes paediatric resuscitation such as the STA Award for Teachers
- Teachers must ensure they are working within the guidelines set out in the Swordfish Swim Code of Practice which includes safeguarding, code of ethics and professional conduct
- The maximum teaching ratio is 12 adult – child pairs to 1 baby and pre-school teacher. A risk assessment may be required to calculate how many pairs one teacher can safely teach during a lesson. Pool space, age and abilities of the pairs should also be taken into consideration as numbers may need to be reduced in order to deliver safe effective lessons.

## **Submersions**

Submersion is likely to occur as part of aquatic activities when adults with babies and pre-schoolers move together in the water. When submersions are carefully introduced by specially trained teachers, they can be beneficial towards creating the best foundations for swimming, as well as helping develop water confidence and water safety skills.

Submersion is only one part of introducing babies and pre-schoolers to the aquatic environment. It should never be the dominant focus as it can be counterproductive to both the aims and objectives of adults and babies enjoying being in water together. An excessive number of submersions can be averse to setting good foundations in swimming.

The policy of Swordfish Swim relates to intentional submersion as a practice that takes place as part of the communication between baby, accompanying adult and the teacher in a structured session.

Submersion is not something done to a baby but with a baby. Any submersion practice that does not take into account the readiness of the baby as demonstrated by 'baby cues',

irrespective of the consent of the accompanying adult, amounts to a forced submersion and is contrary to best practice.

This policy does not include accidental submersions which may happen during a session; these submersions should be avoided as much as possible. Teachers should make sure adults are informed of correct holds and observe all adult and baby pairs carefully.

Swordfish Swim places the willingness and acceptance of the baby or pre-schooler at the forefront of its submersion policy. Submersion practices which are carried out on a baby or pre-schooler without their obvious willingness is liken to enforced behaviour and is not ethically acceptable. More over these practices can compromise healthy brain development of babies.

**Forced submersion is contrary to best practice; it must not be carried out.**

Swordfish Swim recognises 3 classes of acceptable submersions:

### **Intentional submersion**

Submersions intended as part of a structured session, but only carried out as baby or pre-schooler led, after accompanying adults have been briefed by the teacher in the observation of positive cues.

### **Pre-schooler initiated submersion**

Activities led by the teacher such as jumping in, blowing bubbles, jumping from a raft may lead to submersions initiated by the toddler or pre-schooler.

### **Accidental submersion**

The baby/pre-schooler falls in or is submerged inadvertently due to loss of balance during shared activities with the accompanying adult. Teachers are specially trained to manage accidental submersions to avoid distress being caused to either the baby/pre-schooler or accompanying adult.

### **Guidelines for Best Practice**

1. Intentional submersion should only take place when the baby/pre-schooler shows signs that he/she is ready, and only then as part of a fun exercise. If carried out at an inappropriate time, submersion may lead to distress and may result in a baby/pre-schooler experiencing long term fear of water.
2. Submersion practices should be progressive and should be stopped immediately if the baby/pre-schooler shows any signs of distress or unhappiness.
3. Submersions should only take place with the active involvement of the baby/pre-schooler; it should not be attempted when the baby/pre-schooler is looking away or is unaware of what is about to happen.

### **Frequency of Intentional Submersions**

The frequency, depth and duration of submersions should be controlled within the guidelines set out below:

- The frequency of intentional submersions should be based on the baby/pre-schoolers age, physical ability and experience. It will also depend upon the swimming teacher's style and technique of teaching.
- The number of intentional submersions per session should be built up progressively at the baby/pre-schooler's pace.

As a guideline, Swordfish Swim suggests that the following frequencies be used:

- For babies under 6 months old, a maximum of 4 intentional submersions per session; in addition, accidental submersions should be avoided as much as possible. Initially

there may only be one or two submersions, building up to more as the baby develops in age, physical ability and experience.

- For babies aged 6 to 12 months old, the number of intentional submersions can be built up to a maximum of 6 intentional submersions per session, in addition to initiated submersions when babies start jumping in by themselves.
- For toddlers over 12 months old there is no upper limit provided that submersions are child-led and in the context of a happy interaction between accompanying adult and the toddler/pre-schooler.

### **Depth of Submersion**

The depth of submersion is dependent upon age, physical ability and experience of the baby.

Swordfish Swim recommend that:

- No baby under 12 months should be submerged to a depth greater than 1 metre, this a maximum depth. Surface swims with face submerged is recommend for babies with a gradual build up deeper as toddlers develops
- Toddlers/pre-schoolers over 12 months can progressively build up to a maximum submersion depth of 1 metre.

### **Duration of Submersion**

- Babies under 12 months can progressively build up to a submersion time of 3 seconds
- Toddlers/pre-schoolers over 12 months can progressively build up to a submersion time of 10 seconds
- Teachers need to be aware and vigilant as to when a toddler / pre-schoolers need to come up for air.

### **Explanatory Notes**

The principal concern surrounding the number of submersions a baby undertakes is related to water intoxication (hyponatremia). The diving reflex stops water entering the lungs of babies under 12 months.

The volume of water absorbed will modify the salt concentration in babies' blood, which may cause 'water intoxication'. There has not been significant or recent research on this subject other than that carried out by Karl G Rosen, MD, PhD, published by the Swedish Paediatric Association in collaboration with the Swedish Board of Health and Welfare together with the Swedish Swimming Association. His research has shown that a baby needs to drink at least 10% of its body weight for the risk of water intoxication to occur. In a study of 15 babies below the age of 6 months, undertaking a 20 minute swimming session consisting of between 5 and 10 submersions, 7 of the babies increased their body weight by a maximum of 1.6%.

Signs and symptoms of Hyponatremia:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Loss of energy
- Frequent urination
- Unconsciousness.

Seek medical attention as soon as possible.