

# It can all go swimmingly for baby

YOUNG babies have a natural affinity with water. However, there may be times when your baby becomes restless or upset in their swimming lesson.

No parent likes to see their child's tears, and a common reaction of parents to tears in a swim lesson is to become panicked or embarrassed over the way the child is behaving, or instead to think, "my child just doesn't like the water".

Parents need to be aware of the potential reactions of their child in a swim lesson, and they need to understand why such reactions occur and how to

apply appropriate solutions that ensure the lesson is both enjoyable and beneficial to the baby.

Swim lessons can interfere with the sleep or

feeding routine of the child. Signs that this is the case may include rubbing eyes, falling asleep, or baby indicating a need for milk or food. If this is happening, parents should check for alternative class times or try to adjust their routines

## Swim safer

With  
Julia Ham



accordingly. Cold is another factor. A sun-shirt or wet-suit can help, as can simply keeping baby's shoulders under the water. Swim lessons expose an infant to a new environment. Take small steps if your baby is overwhelmed. Talk to your baby in a calm and positive manner, maintain close skin and eye contact, and focus solely on one activity at a time. Babies should be

**Soothing and reassuring talk is a vital component of making baby feel comfortable and at ease in the water**

placed in age-appropriate classes that ensure the activities they complete in a swim lesson are developmentally appropriate. Our instructors are trained to be able to provide alternative activities to cater for the level of a child, so don't be afraid to ask for advice. Toddlers around 15 months old who, through a lack of exposure to aquatic-based experiences have lost their affinity with water, are more



**FUN TIME:** Children respond to a playful and patient parent in the water.

likely to be fearful of water than babies who have been in the water from, say, three to six months. To help prevent the development of this kind of anxiety, parents should try to make the regular bath/shower/pool times they share with their baby fun, secure, and as relaxing as possible. Avoid pushing too hard in water-related activities, and be playful and patient.

Another way to calm an upset child in the water is

through distraction. Toys are excellent stimulants and provide a wonderful distraction. The use of noise, through tapping or singing for example, is also effective. Talk, and particularly soothing and reassuring talk, is a vital component of making baby feel comfortable.

If your child is strong-willed and the type who seems to prefer to do his or her own thing in lessons rather than what you or the instructor wants, remain

firm, and persist with activities that challenge them. Ignore the negative behaviour and focus on the positive behaviour of your child.

A final reaction is that of genuine fear, which is normally a result of a previous bad experience in water, or through parental fears, which the child has learnt by association. Young children absorb so much of their parents' reactions, and are very in tune with the facial expressions, body language,

and spoken language of their parents. If a child hears things like, "don't go near the water, you'll drown" or "it's dangerous", the attitude to water will be negative. Use positive language and maintain a watchful but relaxed attitude near water.

Scared children require small steps and patience and time to be able to explore the water environment at their own pace. Always try to end the lesson on a happy note, so the child remembers the water as a positive experience. Finally, if your baby cries, at all costs avoid getting out of the pool prematurely out of frustration or your own feelings of embarrassment. Stay in the pool, find a quiet area, and take a little bit of time to comfort baby, then rejoin the class as soon as baby is calm.

If you exit the pool whenever baby cries, baby will associate becoming upset with getting out of the pool, or learn to associate crying with having an activity stopped.

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