

# Babes in the Water

Building water confidence from a young age



[www.britishswimming.org](http://www.britishswimming.org)



- We recommend joining a scheme which follows the National Plan for Teaching Swimming.



- Are the lessons structured towards an awards scheme? The ASA has a range of Duckling awards specifically designed for this age group, which can be a great incentive.



It is important that both adult and baby feel comfortable with the set up of a class and have time to prepare for the lesson in advance.

If you require any further information, please contact:

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#### Medical

You can take a child of around 4-6 months swimming, providing the conditions are right. However it is unwise to take them swimming much before this as they become chilled very easily. Never take babies to the pool with open sores or upper respiratory infections.

#### Thinking about joining a class

The best age for children to start water activities is around 4-6 months after they have had their immunisations. This is not a condition of entry but it is recommended. Before enrolling on a course you need to find out the following information;

- Is there a pre-course meeting or information leaflet to help you find out more information?
- Timings – do they fit in with the other demands on your time eg. Picking up other children?
- Is the teacher qualified – ASA Teacher Certificate (Adult and Child Water Activities)?
- How long are the lessons – 30 minutes maximum is recommended?
- How are the lessons structured? Are there aims and objectives for the course?

# Babes in the Water

## *Where do you start?*

Bath time is a great opportunity to familiarise your baby with a water environment and to prepare them for future activities in the swimming pool. Remember that your baby has been immersed in fluid for 9 months before birth and will almost certainly be comfortable when put into water soon after birth, as long as they feel safe.

Initially keep bath time short, reassure your baby by smiling, talking to and maintaining eye contact. Bath time should be fun for both adult and baby and as washing still remains a priority it is an ideal opportunity for your baby to become comfortable when being immersed and encourages adult confidence when handling the baby in water.

From an early age babies will instinctively move arms and legs when immersed in water and will soon be smiling and happy. They should be encouraged to feel the support of the water but there are many activities, which your baby can experience and learn from before moving to the swimming pool environment, usually around 4-6 months.

## *Initial activities*

When putting a young baby in the bath always ensure that there is a non-slip bath mat and that baby's head is well supported. The initial focus should be to ensure that your baby is happy in water, gradually becomes accustomed to feeling water on the face, begins to feel the support which water can give and becomes familiar with moving their legs.

## *Moving to the swimming pool*

If your baby is well accustomed to being in the bath at home there should be few problems associated with transferring to the swimming pool. However, some babies will find the transition a little daunting and a few simple steps can make it a pleasurable activity for both adult and baby:

- Give your baby a very light snack 15-30 minutes before visiting the pool.
- Arrive in plenty of time so that you are not rushing and can stay relaxed.
- Take a familiar bath toy, this can help to put the child at ease.
- Take a swimming costume for yourself and sufficient towels for both yourself and baby.
- Avoid using nappies as they fill with water and become uncomfortable and heavy. Use a specifically designed disposable swim nappy or costume.
- Have a positive attitude.

## *Rest before the lesson*

Your baby should be alert when coming to its classes – a tired baby needs warmth and a snug place to sleep – a pool is none of these. Water awareness classes tend to make baby tired and you will find baby ready for a short nap after the lesson.

## *Get to know each other*

Make friends with the other parents and babies. This will help make the lesson more relaxing and your baby will learn more easily. If baby is enjoying the play with other babies they are less likely to get bored. Watching others enjoying the water will help your baby to join in and enjoy the water.

# Points to **always** remember

- Submerge to your shoulder level. Babies held out of the water will soon become cold.
- Watch baby's face – baby's face is nearer to the water than yours. If you become distracted baby's face may fall below the water. By watching their face at all times, you are also aware of baby's reactions to the lesson and can respond quickly.
- Keep moving – your baby becomes aware that by moving their arms and legs they will stay afloat. Movement also generates heat, if you remain still in the water you and your baby will become cold.
- Freedom – children eager to learn must be given freedom. You will have to experiment to find the best way to hold your active baby and which buoyancy aids might be useful.
- Be adventurous – do not be over cautious – use your imagination and play games.
- Allow the timid child time to adjust – do not hurry a baby who is cautious. Be patient, babies will learn in their own time.
- Understand why your baby is crying – babies communicate by crying and do so for many reasons, the least likely is being in the water. If you get out every time your baby cries they will begin to associate water with crying.