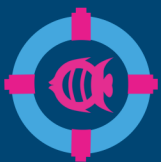
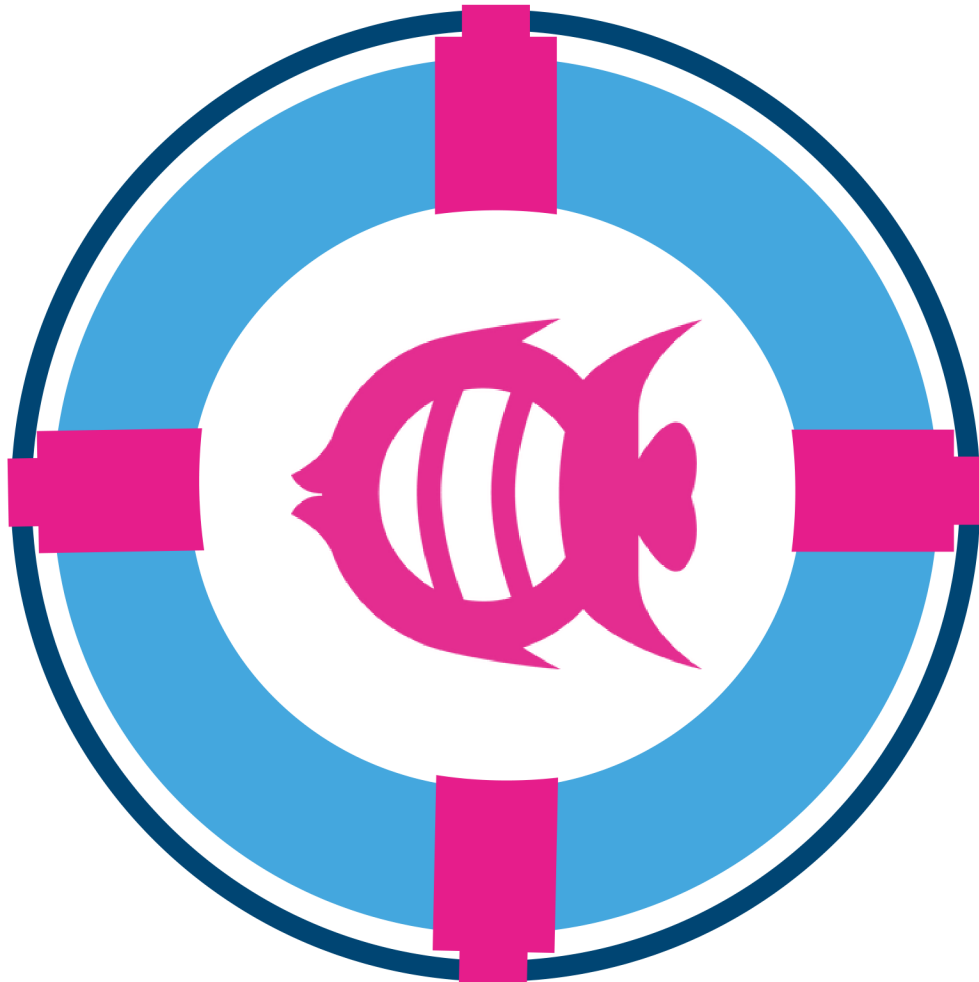


Adaptive Water Safety Toolkit



Extra layers of water safety practices for all abilities

Some swimmers with special needs are drawn to the water, in fact, they can be fascinated by it causing them to disregard all safety to get to the water. We have over 30 years of adaptive aquatics experience to share with you. This guide will provide simple but game-changing tips for swimmers, families, and aquatic centers. Don't wait! Add this free resource to your existing safety practice.

What's included in the kit

Ritual and Routine



Most of our special needs swimmers rely heavily on set routines. Use this to your advantage and create safer routines for transitioning in and out of the water. Implementing these tips will give you a few extra seconds needed to avoid a dangerous situation.

Visual Supervision



We know that swimmers with autism, sensory, and physical challenges need more supervision. We will give you additional tips to safely and calmly intervene when necessary.

Rescue and Equipment



Neurotypical and neurodivergent swimmers alike need to understand how to use lifejackets and rescue tubes. It is imperative to familiarize everyone with rescue equipment. This guide will provide you with some extra steps to take with your adaptive swimmers.

Adaptive Swim Skills



Swim lessons are a layer of protection that is recommended by all safety organizations. Some swimmers with cerebral palsy, down syndrome, anxiety, autism, and sensory or motor difficulties may need more time and a different approach when learning to swim. In this guide, you will gain adaptive tips to improve swim skill acquisition for swimmers of all abilities.



Ritual and Routine



Ask at home for the bathtub

Teach swimmers to verbally ask or nonverbally gesture/point before entering a body of water. You can use a head nod for physically impaired swimmers. Use any type of communication to indicate asking and receiving permission to enter a bathtub, pool, lake, ocean or any body of water.

Equipment use should NOT become a routine

Use equipment when needed (like a lifejacket) but be sure to have structured swim time without floats and goggles. Use equipment as a tool, not a permanent solution. Be mindful of flippers and floats that give a false sense of security. If your swimmer is independent only with flippers, what happens if one falls off?

Take side and provide a prompt

Have your swimmer hold the wall, while repeating the sentence "the side is safe". Have them hold for 5 and count out loud. Never take your child off the wall. You can tap their shoulder and get them to look at you, then take a hand.

Transition routine to allow time or delay

Create a routine that will delay entry into the water for any unsafe or unaware swimmer. For example, ask the swimmer to "clap their hands, touch their toes, clap their hands, like Simon says" and then get in the water. For the super seekers, creating a more lengthy routine of things they like to do such as 'head, shoulders, knees and toes' or a favorite song to always sing before they get in, will allow you the time you need to intervene in the unlikely event they wander to the pool ahead of you.



Visual Supervision



Reduce underwater breath holding

Some swimmers love being underwater due to the hydrostatic pressure which acts like a big calming hug, the deeper you go the more pressure there is. Due to this, they will seek it repeatedly with disregard for breathing. Watch for safe submersion and allow structured underwater time with breaks for above-the-surface water play.

Observe excessive drinking

Many kids with sensory and physical challenges love to drink, suck and spit the water. Watch the amount or number of times water is swallowed. If it is ongoing, try having them swim on their back, bite on a chew toy, or move to a preferred game on top of the water.

Lifeguard education

Special needs swimmers that are drawn to the water are likely to wander while you are at the pool, lake or ocean. Inform the lifeguard that your child may need more attention. By educating the lifeguard to notice signs of sensory discomfort, like a child that covers their ears, they will be more aware that this child needs extra supervision and a different approach to just blowing a whistle.

Brightly colored swimwear

Pools get busy and lakes get dark. One tip is to wear brighter colored swimwear. This will make it easier when you are the 'Water Watcher' for your swimmer that might be trying to swim off. You could consider a swim cap that is also a brighter color for ease of identifying where they are located in the pool.



Rescue and Equipment



Life jackets

Standard life jackets may or may not work for your special needs swimmer. There are different types and styles and each swimmer has a unique body type.

- Get your child comfortable in the bathtub with wearing the lifejacket.
- Go to the pool to see if the lifejacket supports your swimmer effectively.
- Try putting on cotton pajamas to improve comfort and body awareness. This also helps with propelling independently since it will give a little extra weight and helps control excessive buoyancy.

Rescue tube

For successful rescues, it is essential to familiarize swimmers with the rescue tube/equipment. Let them hold it, touch it, and identify it as a safety device. Most rescue tubes have a slippery surface which can be uncomfortable for some swimmers to touch or hold onto, so practice is a must. Another tip is to bring it into your special needs classroom.

Inform local aquatic facility

If you go to the same pool or town pond during the summer months, consider informing the aquatic director, deck supervisor, or lifeguards about your swimmer's needs.

- Provide a photo of your child and some ideas for keeping them safer.
- Introduce the aquatic director to your swimmer and explain how to best communicate with your swimmer.
- If your child has a physical limitation and needs a lift, schedule a time to use the lift and improve poolside entry safety.

Take and hold floating objects

When you go swimming, practice "take and hold" with any floating object such as a kickboard, barbell or noodle. Try to improve a ritual of taking and propelling to the side. Then, once they are safely at the side, they can hold on and make a train along the wall to the shallow end or steps.



Adaptive Swim Skills



Submerging

It is imperative that you teach your swimmer how to submerge! Any swim instructor can help your swimmer to gain this skill and you can also work on it at home. Identify body parts "mouth, nose, eyes, hair - under." Successful submerging will improve a safe rescue as the swimmer will be more comfortable holding their breath. Contact your local swim school for assistance in gaining this life saving skill.

Reduce anxiety

For some swimmers, buoyancy can be anxiety provoking because it makes them feel unstable. Try walking in the water with canvas shoes or 1 lb ankle weights. If you don't have those, you can wear a long sleeve cotton shirt, pajamas, or cotton socks to weigh you down. Show social stories and videos of successful and happy swimmers in the water.

Never give up, investigate the underlying problem

Have you tried traditional swim lessons and not seeing results? Is your swimmer having issues meeting the swim skill benchmarks? If so, try and assess what the obstacle might be. Common examples include: time of day, water temperature, noise, depth, instructor, too much equipment or facility. Investigate and don't give up.

Rollovers and breath control

Being able to rollover and take a breath is a vital safety skill. Use these tips to practice at home and then head to the pool.

- Log rolling on the floor or on your bed.
- Use your bathtub 50% full and practice.
- Watch videos of 'swim-float-swim'.
- Watch Swim Angelfish YouTube: Swim Whisperer Story playlist.



Parents Resource

Adaptive Safety Tips and Education



P - Properties of the Water

- Surface Tension
 - Breaking the 'elastic band' at the surface of the water gives a lot of sensory input.
- Buoyancy
 - Can help physically impaired swimmers to float & move.
- Hydrostatic Pressure
 - Pressure acts like a big calming hug, the deeper you go the more pressure there is.

A- Awareness

- Get comfortable with a rescue tube by showing videos and photos. Practice with a rescue tube. Identify (shallow/ deep) and say "I stand in the shallow, I swim in the deep."

R- Routines

- Create a routine of asking to enter the water and plan a transition for a safe exit.

E- Equipment

- Use equipment as a tool, not a permanent solution. Stay at arm's length.

N- Never Give Up

- Time and Temperature.
- Assess what the obstacle might be: time of day, temperature, noise, depth, instructor, too much equipment, or facility. Investigate!

T- Training

- As a parent, you have permission to ask your local swim school about their adaptive training. Specifically, ask "How long is the training?", "Can I see an outline of the training?", "Is there a specific systematic approach that is taught?" and "Does it address all abilities?"

S- Swim Ideas

- Successful submerging will improve a successful save, so find a way to go under.
- Watch the free adaptive resource of "What Every Swim Instructor Needs to Know" for more strategies related to commonly seen roadblocks.



Lifeguard Resource

Adaptive Safety Tips and Education



L- Look and Listen

- Seek subtle signs of special needs
- Alert (tracking) bracelets/headphones/excessive splashing/sounds/atypical movements.

I- Identify

- Observe seeking behaviors and provide extra visual checks.
- Notice signs of physical impairments (wheelchair etc.) and offer help when appropriate.

F- Fun or Frenzy

- If you see a swimmer's fun begin to escalate into overstimulation, investigate.
- Notice signs of sensory discomfort, like covering their ears. If this happens, try a different approach to resolve the problem.

E- Expected vs. Unexpected

- Let them know you are going to touch them or blow the whistle if possible. Expected touch is often more tolerable than unexpected. Approach from the side if necessary, to decrease fear.

G- Give Time and Space

- Be patient and use varying methods to communicate your message (gestures).
- If a swimmer runs away as you approach, try to bend down and ask them to come to you. Keep in mind, some sensory swimmers avoid eye contact but are still listening.

U- Understanding

- Speak with few words and pause to allow time for them to respond. If they don't comply, perhaps they need you to show them in a different way. "First this, then that" might work.

A- Ask

- Ask the parents "How can I help you?" & "What can I do for you?"

R- Risk Management

- Extended underwater breath holding can be a risk for seekers who like the pressure. Watch and educate the parent and swimmer to set a time limit or alternate activity.
- Know how to use wheelchair lifts and other poolside adaptive equipment.

D- Diversity and Inclusion

- Educate yourself! Check out Swim Angelfish's YouTube playlist: Swim Whisperer Stories.
- Be the agent of change by sharing these FREE RESOURCES.

