



Guide to Bath Time Swim Lesson Prep:

Start with the basics. When preparing a toddler for a structured learning experience, what they need to develop is vocabulary, awareness, and confidence. We will filter everything through that lens in this guide.

- 1. Don't be shy with the water.** Make sure your toddler is used to getting water on their face and on their ears. You can slowly work them up to this. Being comfortable with their face and ears getting wet is crucial for water safety.
- 2. Create awareness.** Practice identifying a variety of body parts and putting them in the water. Knowing where their body parts are in space (IE in or out of the water) is an important part of development.
- 3. Introduce new vocabulary.** Splash! Drip, drip, drip, sink, float, wave, etc. Confidence in the water means understanding how the water works, plus instructions and explanations.
- 4. Teach them new skills.** Simple skills like exhaling through their nose and mouth on command will help them learn to blow bubbles. Kicking is also a big favorite because of all the splashing!
- 5. Build up their tolerance.** Small discomforts can be scary for young children. They often don't differentiate between discomfort (feels funny/tickles) and pain (ouch!). There are simple practices you can develop to increase their tolerance and get them accustomed to new sensory inputs.

Detailed suggestions for each of the 5 tips above can be found on the following pages. To learn more about Whatley Swim and register for lessons, visit <https://www.whatleyswim.com>.

Now, let's dive into the details...

Time to prepare for swim lessons! The suggestions below will help your little swimmer get the most out of the instruction they receive and set them up for success in the water. You don't have to wait until your toddler can do everything before enrolling them in swim lessons. Just keep in mind that, until they do, a lot of the work they do and the games they play in swim lessons will be focused on developing these competencies. Vocabulary and self-awareness are skills that continue to develop throughout childhood and a skilled instructor will be able to hone these skills as your child learns to swim and adjust the curriculum to their needs. The following tips and practices will accelerate the student's progress and help you get the most out of your time and effort. Let's get you ready for swim lessons!

1. **Don't be shy with the water.** You probably already wash their face and ears with a washcloth or wet wipe. Now, practice taking it further by having them get their own face wet. Sometimes, it can be fun for them to get your face wet, too. An example of a game where you practice this would be:
 - a. **Using a proxy:** You can start by using hands, a sponge, or a toy for this.
 - i. **I'm going to get my hands wet!** Now it's your turn. Get your hands wet. Good job!
 - ii. **Now, I'm going to get my chin wet!** (Wet your chin using your wet hands.) Now it's your turn. Get your

chin wet. Good job! Continue like this with all the parts of the face and head like this. (Chin, cheeks, ears, forehead, back of head.)

- b. **Troubleshooting:** If they are hesitant to wet their own chin, etc., try this: Ok, I'm going to wet my chin. Wow! So fun! Ok, now I'll wet your chin. Good job! Now, you wet my chin. Awesome! Ok, your turn. Time to get your chin wet. See what they are willing to do and progress from there.
- c. **Direct contact with the water:** Next, try getting them to dip each part of their face in the water. If the water in the bath is too shallow for them to reach from a seated position, try asking them to get on all fours so they can reach the water with their face.
 - i. The “**My Turn, Your Turn**” game from above will work.
 - ii. “**Simon Says**” can work here or you can invent your own way to practice.
- d. **Pouring the water:** This can be as simple as letting the water pour on their face when you're rinsing them off. You can start by using a toy or showerhead that creates a gentle rainwater effect, and progress to a cup or a small bucket. Encourage your toddler to pour water on themselves! Once they get used to it, they typically have a lot of fun.

2. Create awareness. For swim lessons, it is helpful for students to know where the following body parts are and whether they are in the water or out of the water:

- a. **Body Parts:** Arms, legs, hands, feet, elbows, knees, shoulders, bottom, tummy, back, head, face, hair, chin, mouth, nose, cheeks, ears, eyes, forehead.

- b. **Tomato, tomato:** Different families use different words for bottom, tummy, and some other body parts. Be sure to let your instructor know which words you all use so they can give your toddler easy-to-follow instructions.
- c. **Relating to the water:** An easy and fun way to start teaching the concept of in the water versus out of the water is with toys. Playing pickup games with is an easy way to start this conversation.
 - i. **Pickup game:** Dump some toys into the water and ask them to pick them up and put them back in the container. (A plastic tumbler and some pretty, oversized craft marbles work great!)
 - ii. **Adding nuances:** Ask them to put the marbles or toys in the water and then take them out of the water. Now you can apply this concept to body parts.
 - iii. **Game suggestions:** “Simon Says” and “The Hokey Pokey” can work here or you can invent your own way to practice.

3. Introduce new vocabulary. Start by using this vocabulary yourself, then progress to asking them to demonstrate understanding by following directions of playing games.

- a. **Demonstrative Adjectives:** They do not need to know lefts and rights, but after using one side (IE this arm), it's helpful if they know that the other arm means the one that they haven't used yet. Example: This arm, that arm, the other arm, etc.
- b. **Prepositions:** on your back, on your tummy, in the water, underwater, out of the water.

c. **Special verbs:** blow air, suck in air, spit water, drink water, splash, scoop, float, sink, kick.

4. Teach them new skills. Introduce them to laying in the water on their back and on their stomach, blowing bubbles, and kicking.

a. **Lying face up:** This is the basis for learning to float on their back. In shallow water, have them lie on their back with their heels and the back of their head resting on the floor of the tub. The water should cover their ears, but not their face. Encourage them to relax or pretend to take a nap.

b. **Lying face down:** When they are on their stomach, they can support themselves with their hands or their elbows, allowing their stomach and legs to touch the floor or float behind them. Their legs should be fully extended, as if they were preparing to kick.

c. **Mouth bubbles:** Teach them to blow bubbles with their mouth by saying ooooo or ohhhh with their lips in the water. You can practice this by telling them to “blow their candles out,” or blow bubbles through a straw in the bathwater. If they are hesitant to put their mouth in the water, start with a long disposable straw and over time, trim it until their lips are very close to the water.

d. **Nose bubbles:** Learning to blow bubbles through their nose is also important and they can learn that by learning to hum. *CAREFUL!* If they don't understand the difference between sniffing and blowing their nose, they are likely to inhale water through their nose. Make sure they know the difference and cue them to hum above the water first, to ensure that they understand what to do. The noise of humming is not necessary for learning nose bubbles, the

humming is good feedback for you and them that they are exhaling and not inhaling.

- e. **Kicking:** Ask them to practice kicking seated, lying on their back, and lying on their tummy, supported by their hands or elbows. A game that works well for this is “Red Light Green Light” (Red = stop, yellow = slow, green = go fast and big splashes).

5. Build up their tolerance. Some things just take time and habit. New sensations, restrictions, or exposures can require a lot of time during lessons. Repeated practice can put students at ease.

- a. **Wearing goggles:** PSA! Breath-holding and closed eyes will slow progress. This is because seeing and breathing are the huge calming factors for your little one’s nervous system. For this reason, learning to blow bubbles underwater and using goggles will be a big priority for experienced swim instructors. When students can see and exhale, their bodies relax and then the real learning can begin. Purchase some goggles and have your toddler practice wearing them around the house or in the bath. If the goggles bother them, start small: 5 seconds at a time. Then, you can gradually improve their endurance.

- i. **Goggle fit:** Goggles should not have any gaps around the cheeks and corners of the eyes, or else they will fill with water. The strap or straps should stay up around the widest part of the head and should not slide down or rest on the tops of the ears.
- ii. **Make it fun:** Once toddlers realize they can see underwater wearing goggles, they are fascinated and more willing to wear them. There are also many specialized designs from princess, to dragon, shark,

or unicorn goggles. Sometimes picking out their own pair can make it more fun! Seeing how cool they look in the mirror can help, too.

- b. **Face in the water:** In the first section of this guide, we explained how to gradually accustom them to the feeling of water on their face. Start asking them to wet their face with their hands and work up to dipping their face in water and then gently pouring water on their head, allowing it to run down their face.
- c. **Ears in the water:** Practice getting their ears wet and then work up to them laying on their back or side in shallow water with their ears submerged. If they have tubes in their ears, or can't seem to get used to it, wax ear plugs are always an option. Please consult your pediatrician and keep those little ears safe!

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