



Bath time activities

The household bath is the first water environment children are exposed to as young children, and time spent in the bath can serve as a wonderful place to have fun while gaining confidence in the water.

For children who are in swimming classes, the bath can be a place where you can practice skills and even learn some new skills. For young children who are not in swimming classes yet, the bath can be a place where Mum and Dad can begin teaching some basic water skills.

So often teachers hear from very excited students that they have learnt something new at home in the bath, which is just wonderful. Here are some tips to get you started...

Some hints for successful bath-time learning:

- For eye comfort and visibility have the play/learning time before the addition of any soap, bubble bath or shampoo.
- Keep an eye on the water temperature. It may drop considerably if the child is in the bath for a long period. The ideal water temp is between 35-37°C.
- Using goggles can be great in the bath for the more experienced child.
- **MAKE BATH TIME LOTS OF FUN:**
 - Have bright toys made of plastic, foam or cloth to play and learn with.
 - Many items from around the house are just as good as expensive bath toys, like plastic cups, bowls, colanders, plastic framed mirrors etc.
 - Offer lots and lots of encouragement and praise.
 - Have fun with adding mixtures to the bath water, eg. bubble bath, bath jelly, etc.
- ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS supervise your child in the bath!

Some things to try for infants/children with little or no water experience:

- Play with toys in the bath. Particularly for nervous children, having toys in the bath distracts them and leads to a more relaxed and calm experience. Play with your bath toys in the same way you would play with them on land. Stack cups on top of each other, put toys inside other toys, knock toys together and listen to the different sounds they make. Let the children practice reaching, holding, rattling, investigating, and splashing with their toys. Have fun with them.
- Get your child used to what water feels like on their body. Using a sponge or face-washer, gently 'trickle' water over your child's body. Down their back, on the back of their head, around their neck, over their shoulders, along their arms and onto their tummies. Let the children reach out and try to touch the trickling water. You can sing "It's raining, it's pouring" if you like. As the children get more comfortable, use a cup to pour larger amounts of water gently over their body.
- Practice lying on their back. Run the bath water deep enough so your child can lie on their back with their ears submerged, but with their face clear of the water. Place your hand behind your child's head when lowering them onto their back, so they feel secure. Stroke their forehead and top of the head to encourage their head back into the water. And give them lots of kisses and cuddles throughout. Hold toys up in the air so they have fun things to look at, or make sounds under the water so they have fun things to listen to. This is a great start for getting children used to floating on their backs and the unusual sensation of having water in their ears. If you start this

from a young age, children grow up with little or no resistance to the sensation of water in their ears. If your child is a little bit older it is very common for children to not like lying on their back and/or not like water in their ears. If this is the case, gently persist with the activity and provide lots of distractions so they can think about other things and not worry so much about being on their back.

- Learn how to cope with splashes on their face. Throughout your time in the bath, it is inevitable that water will be splashed in their face. And possibly, they might even accidentally submerge their face in the water (make sure you are always close by to lift their face out of the water if this happens). If and when this happens, don't go flying into dramatics (even if they do). Calmly wipe their eyes once (yes, only once – the aim of wiping their eyes is not to dry their face, it's just to get the bulk of the water out of their eyes so they can see properly) and if needed wipe their hair backwards over their head so that the water in their hair isn't dripping all over their face. Tell them that they're alright. Give them a cuddle and distract them with some toys, games or a song.
- Change positions with your child in the water. If they start to squirm on their back, change positions and support them in a sitting position. If they start to get bored in a sitting position, change positions and support them on their tummy. Keep the children moving so they enjoy bath time and learn that you don't always have to be in the same position. Sometimes your face is close to the water, sometimes it's far away. Sometimes your ears are underwater, sometimes they're not. Sometimes the water's in front of you, sometimes it's behind you.
- Move them through the water. Learning how water works is an amazing thing for a child. Learning that every time you move in water you can feel ripples on your skin is a totally different sensation to being on land. Also, the feeling of water moving around them can be very relaxing for children. It's like a massage. So, help this by moving your children in the water. On their back, gently move them forwards and backwards up and down the bath (being careful that the wave you create at either end doesn't get too scary for them). You can do the same on their tummy. When they're sitting, move their arms from side to side so they can feel the water running through their fingers.
- Experiment with deep and shallow water. The water doesn't always have to be exactly the same height. Sometimes run a deep bath and sometimes run a shallow bath. If having a shallow bath, keep in mind that more of their wet body is exposed to the air so they are often colder. In this case, use a cup to constantly pour warm bath water over their body to stay warm. If having a deep bath, keep in mind that is much harder to balance in deep water and toppling over is much easier. So, be close by at all times (which you should be anyway!)

Some things to try for children with some water experience:

- Start teaching your child verbal cues for movements in the water:
 - “Kick, kick, kick...”: Practice kicking in the bath. Get your child lying down on their back (preferably with their ears underwater) and practice a kicking movement with their legs. Support around their knees and repeat “kick, kick, kick...” while you help move their legs. Or if they're a bit older and can kick by themselves see whether they can make bubbles in the bath by kicking their legs. (Also, if they can kick by themselves get ready to have a wet bathroom! And a wet you!)
 - “Scoop, scoop, scoop...”: Practice scooping arm action in the bath. Sit your child up on their bottom and practice a scooping movement in the water with their arms. Support around their elbows and repeat “scoop, scoop, scoop...” while you help move their arms. Or if they're a bit older and can scoop by themselves, see if they can pretend to be a dog and “dig a hole” in the water.
 - “1, 2, 3”: Practice the cue for submersions in the bath. Sit your child up on their bottom, say “[Your child's name], 1, 2, 3”, pause for 1 second (just long enough for them to take a breath), pour water over their head, and then give them lots of kisses and cuddles. Start with pouring just a little bit of water over the back of their head, then move to pouring a little bit of water over the front of their head, and then increase the amount of water until it goes over their eyes and nose.
- Start teaching your child how to blow bubbles:
 - For younger children:
 - Young children do not have the breath control to blow bubbles themselves yet, but they will love watching you do it. The hot tip for showing your children how to blow bubbles is to make noises



with your mouth while you do it. That is, pretend your talking and making funny noises underwater. Ultimately, they will try to copy you and if they make noises with their mouth too, it saves you trying to explain about blowing out as it will happen automatically.

- For older children:
 - Show them how to blow bubbles as per younger children.
 - You can also, try to get them to blow a floating toy across the bath, and slowly get their mouth closer to the water.
 - Or you can put plastic musical instruments in the bath like a recorder or harmonica. Practice blowing in them and playing them in the air, then have a go blowing them under water.
- Let the children learn that they can control where water goes. Let them pour water over themselves with a plastic cup. Or if having a bath with them, let them pour water over you. See if they can use their hands in a cup shape to fill up a toy with water. There are also some great bath toys with wheels and other moving parts. Put one of them in the bath and watch how when you put water in the top it makes everything move.

Some things to try for children with more water experience:

- Encourage your child to put their face under water:
 - Play a game of what part of their face can they get wet while they blow bubbles. Start with blowing bubbles and getting their chin wet. Then blow bubbles and get their lips wet. Then the bottom of their nose, top of their nose, cheeks, eyes, eye brows, forehead, and then do their hair. Remember to give them lots of praise and encouragement, even if they can't do it yet.
 - Once your child is confident putting their face in the water, count how long they can stay there for. Start with a cue like "1, 2, 3, Go" and count out loud while your child submerges. Children love getting better and better at this.
 - Practice wearing goggles in the bath. Wearing goggles in the bath is great practice time to get used to them. And when they realise that they can see underwater with their goggles they love it! When they're wearing goggles encourage them to open their eyes underwater by:
 - Placing a laminated picture or plastic placemat with pictures on it on the bottom or side of the bath (depending on your child's ability to submerge). Ask your child to put their head in the water and either pick up or point to a particular item. Remember to give them lots of praise and encouragement, even if they can't do it yet.
 - (A swim school parent once told me of this activity that they made up in their bath. It worked really well for her kids who were VERY stubborn about not putting their heads in the water). If your children understand that you buy treats at the shop with money, try placing some 5-20 cent pieces at the bottom of the bath and encourage the children to blow bubbles and pick them up. They can then take the money that they picked up in the bath to the shops and buy a little treat.
- Practice floating in the bath. Put your hand behind your child's head so that (if needed) you can hold your child's face above the water with their ears underwater. Encourage your child to relax and lift up their chin, chest, tummy, bottom and lastly their legs to see if they can float in the bath. Remember to give them lots of praise and encouragement, even if they can't do it by themselves yet.
- Practice moving the water around in the bath. Any swirling and pushing around of the bath water is not just fun. It's also great great great great practice for learning how to scull, which is the basic hand action for any formal swimming action, including: freestyle, backstroke, breaststroke, treading water, even just basic doggy paddle... Everything. So, have fun making whirlpools in the water. Get the children to sit in the middle of the bath and place some toys around them. Get them to move their hands and arms so that they push the water around them in a circle and therefore move the toys around them in a circle. Have toy races and try to guess which toy is going to get round the bath first.



Anything that you do in the bath should compliment your child's formal swimming lessons:

- If your child is in formal swimming lessons, try to use the same words as their teacher.
 - For example, at Healthways we use a "[Name], 1, 2, 3" submersion cue with infants (as described previously). Use this same cue when in the bath at home and use it consistently. Don't sometimes say "1, 2, 3" and sometimes say "Ready, Set, Go". Keep it consistent. It's always "[Name], 1, 2, 3".
- Also, if your teacher is trying to correct an aspect of your child's swimming and describing it a certain way, try to use that same terminology at home.
 - For example, kicking incorrectly is very common and at Healthways we often describe correct kicking as having "long legs, pointed toes". So, if you're practicing kicking in the bath, try to encourage "long legs and pointed toes".

HAVE FUN IN THE BATH WITH YOUR CHILDREN!

We hope this information sheet helps you have a great time in the bath with your children. Time spent playing, laughing, and learning in the bath can be a lovely bonding experience for the whole family. Enjoy!

In the meantime, while you are experimenting with the activities in this handout, if you would like more information about formal swimming lessons please phone us on the numbers below or visit www.healthways.com.au.