

Breath Holding Activities

1) Breath Control

The aim is to ensure children take a breath before they close their mouth and maintain a closed mouth while they have their face in the water.

- Encourage the children to take a big breath in and puff their cheeks to make a 'balloon face' or 'puffer cheeks'. When you demonstrate this for your child, take a big breath whilst making a loud breathing in noise so the children realise you taking a breath in and are not just closing your mouth to make a funny face.

2) Showering

- Use a cup of water to pour over the child's head. Start pouring at the back of their head and work your way forward towards their face, if they are ready and prepared for it.
- Begin with a trickle of water over their face and work towards creating a 'waterfall', which is a long, controlled pour, over their face.
- Never do this to a crying baby - relax them by laying them down in the bath, distracting with coloured toys, soothing words. Once relaxed, try again. When the baby is becoming well conditioned he/she will close their eyes on the trigger. Stiffening is a natural response to water being poured over their head be aware of the child's response to this.

3) Face in the water

- If you have a bath try to encourage the children to put their face in the water. Have the water shallow enough that they can lay on their tummy, propping their chest up with their arms and have the ability to lift and lower their face from the water. Have them take a big breath in, ensure their mouth is closed and place their face in the water. As the water will be stagnant only do this for a few seconds at a time as the water will more easily go up their nose, and ensure they do not sniff the water.
- If they are cautious to put their face directly in the water start by asking them to put their chin in, then their cheeks, ears, lips, nose, eyes and then the whole face. This process may take time but if you are patient and reassuring they will gain confidence.

Kicking Activities

Kicking can be practiced very easily. Whether they are sitting at the dinner table or reading a book in bed they can do a kicking action!

1) Freestyle/Backstroke

- Whenever we do a freestyle/backstroke kick we want to have a straight, small, fast kick. The key is to have the child kick from the hip, not the knee. It needs to be relaxed but not bent.
- Have the children sit on the edge of a chair with straight legs kicking them up and down, aiming to lightly tap their big toes together. You can assist by placing your hands above their feet, giving them a target to hit, or by placing your arms both above and below their feet to ensure they do not kick too big, or too small!

- You can have the children lay down in bed, or on the floor, whether on their tummy or back, and have them kick up and down again. For an extra challenge have the child get under their blanket/sheets and tuck them in tightly for some resistance.

2) Breaststroke

- If your child is practicing breaststroke you can have them practice their kick on the floor or bed as well. Have them lay on their tummy, lift their heels to their bottom, point their toes out to the side, push their feet backwards and then squeeze their feet together. Try to make sure their knees do not come far apart. To create more resistance for them hold onto their feet and guide their legs around as they push against your hands.

Arm Activities

1) Doggy Paddle Arms

- For the little ones who are practicing doggy paddle they can practice reaching their arms forward and scooping them back to their chest all the time! Whether they are sitting and playing, watching TV, in the bath or shower. Just have them stretch in front and scoop back in!

2) Stationary Windmill arms

- Have the children standing with one arm stretched up and one arm pointing down. Have them move their arms like a windmill ensuring they stay straight and opposite. Not too fast and not too slow, just a continuous motion. Play a game with the children and tell them to pause every now and then, see if their arms are still opposite each other.

3) Walking windmill arms

- Once they have mastered the stationary arms have them complete the same activity but while walking around the house. This will help with the coordination of moving their arms and legs together.
- This can be done forward for freestyle or backwards for backstroke...just be careful walking backwards!

4) Freestyle Bent arm drills

- If your child is learning a bent arm freestyle they can do a stationary arm drill similar to above however it is easier if they place on leg forward, one back and are bent at the waist so their torso is facing the floor.
- To work on their bent arm recovery have them kneel next to their bed, place one arm on the mattress reaching backwards, with their palm facing the ceiling. This is the end of their pull and can work on their recovery. They point their elbow up and have a relaxed wrist and hand, dragging their fingertips on the mattress as they begin to reach their arm forward as if to enter the water at the top of the stroke. Have them either pull their arm backwards next to the bed or simply move their arm back to the starting position of this drill.

5) Breaststroke arm drills

- Have your child lay on the bed with their arms hanging off the end, keeping their chest on the bed. They will be able to practice their breaststroke arm stroke and breathing in this position. Have the child reach their arms in a streamline position,

ensuring their head is down. They should count to three and then separate their arms, while keeping their arms straight. Once their hands get to just outside shoulder width apart they should bend their elbows and begin to catch 'the water'. At this point they lift their head to breathe and start pulling their arms towards the bed. As their hands reach the bed they bring their hands back together, underneath their chin. Their head goes back down and they push their arms forward quickly. The order of the arm stroke is Pull, breathe, glide (for 3 seconds).

Breathing activities

- 1) Have your child put one hand on the back of a chair, with their arm stretched out straight, other arm by their side. Bend at the hips and put their chin down towards their chest. Their ear should be sitting in their arm pit. To practice breathing they should gently roll their shoulder and torso slightly so that their head rolls to the side and they can take a breath without separating their ear from their arm pit. Breathing in swimming should be subtle, almost hidden. Children should not be lifting their head or separating their ear from the armpit to take a breath, just gently roll to the side, take a quick breath in their mouth and roll back to a flat position. Have the children breath out their nose while their face is down, simulating blowing bubbles, have them count to 3 and on the 3rd count they do a big breath out their mouth to expel any air left in their lungs and on the 4th count have them roll to take a breath in their mouth. When the children have their face out of the water they should not have to blow air out before breathing in, it should all be expelled before they turn.
- 2) The above can be practiced with arms moving as well. Repeat the same breathing process but have their arms moving at opposites and fit the timing of the breath within the stroke.