

# SWIMMING TIPS FOR SENSORY KIDS AND RELUCTANT SWIMMERS

Activities in the water can help children with autism, ADHD or specific sensory challenges strengthen their sensory processing skills, while also providing calming and modulating benefits.

## 1 || Use a Visual Schedule

Visual schedules are a simple, highly successful tool for communicating routines and expectations to children. Make it waterproof for the pool and focus on safety expectations first!

## 2 || Get the Right Equipment

Goggles, rash guards, water shoes, and earplugs go a long way toward making sensory input more tolerable for the tactile, visual, and auditory systems and can provide proprioceptive input for calming, too! Give the child options for which equipment might help him feel more comfortable in the water!

## 3 || Start in the Tub

The bathtub is a controlled environment where it's easy to work on getting all parts of the body wet, blowing bubbles in the water to encourage submersion of the face, practicing different body positions in the water (lying on the back or belly) and is small enough to help a child feel safe during early introductions to water.

## 4 || Be Aware of the Warning Signs

Children with sensory difficulties may have trouble using words to express how they are feeling in a situation that feels challenging to them. Watch for changes in breathing, stressed facial expressions, avoidance of activities or fight or flight physical reactions such as tremors, crying, a death grip on the side of the pool or instructor. Being aware of and responding to these warning signs can help prevent a meltdown.

## 5 || Make it Fun

There are tons of fun water toys that will keep water time interesting and entertaining. Think squirt toys, water guns, sponges, buckets, etc.

## 6 || Stay Away from Peak Pool Times

Pools can get loud and crowded during peak times. If you have a child with auditory sensitivities this can be a huge challenge. Try heading to the pool early in the morning or ask the instructor or facility for options for smaller class times or a lesson that might be available when the pool has less traffic.

## 7 || Consider Water Temperature

Warmer water is typically easier to tolerate for anyone, let alone children with neuromotor and sensory issues. Find a site with a therapeutic pool or children's activity pool that may be kept at a warmer temperature than a typical lap pool.

# SWIMMING TIPS FOR SENSORY KIDS AND RELUCTANT SWIMMERS (CONTINUED)

## 8 || Give the Child Some Control

Offer different ways to get in the water — ladder, jumping, sliding in from the wall. Pull out that visual schedule and offer the child choices of activities that she can put in the order that she would like to have them happen.

## 9 || Start Slowly

If you have a pool with a ramp or zero depth entry, perfect! Have the child walk into the pool at their own pace. If these options aren't available, try playing in buckets poolside with feet dangling in the water. Have the child reaching in the water to fill sponges or squirt toys to get hands and arms wet. Maybe progress to squeezing some water overhead!

## 10 || Make a Routine

For many kids with sensory processing issues, challenging experiences can be made slightly easier when the child knows exactly what to expect. Having a predictable approach, predictable expectations, and using predictable activities at the pool can help put the child at ease.