

School Swimming Lessons

Tips for parents/carers on supporting children with a disability or developmental difficulty with school swimming lessons



Many primary schools will take children on an intensive swimming course when they reach year 5. This can be a great opportunity for children to learn an important life skill and an activity that many children enjoy. This can also be a time of great anxiety for some children/young people with a disability or developmental difficulty and parents alike.

Parents have approached Sparkle for advice and guidance on this topic but it is important to remember that every child will react differently to swimming lessons and the support they need will also be different. For many, swimming will be an enjoyable experience.

This toolkit includes questions to ask school, what the common difficulties are that children face when they start swimming and suggestions to prepare your child. It is hoped that these will help you and your child feel more confident.

Schools will give you a lot of information, but sometimes it can be helpful to know what type of questions to ask. They will want to make it a smooth experience for your child too.

What you might want to find out;

- Will the school be preparing your child for the change in routine with pictures/countdowns? A countdown is a visual support. Visual supports can be a good way of introducing change. A countdown is normally a calendar including pictures of what is happening on each day and allows your child to ease in to an impending change of schedule.



- Will they get support in the water?
- Will your child know the person supporting them in the pool?
- How are the children separated in the pool? Children will normally be separated by ability but will there be plastic divides or will there be a separate smaller pool for beginners?
- How many children are being taught by the teacher at the same time?
- Will there be public sessions on at the same time?
- Will there be help for the children to change?
- Will children be using floatation aids?



Each teacher will have different tools and methods for teaching children how to swim. There are many different types of floatation aids.



Not all pools will be closed to the public when swimming lessons are taking place and the space available to the children will depend on this. Liaising with school allows you to prepare your child.

You know your child better than anyone else, but here are some common difficulties that children with developmental difficulties experience when they go to swimming pools.

Things your child might find difficult:



- The change in the school routine and a new environment.
- The echoes and noise of the swimming pool.
- Being splashed in the pool.
- The pool being hot and steamy/colder than they anticipated
- Being close to other children and/or being touched by other children in the pool.
- Being scared of the water.
- Having to change clothes in a new environment.



Children can surprise you. You might think your child will hate swimming but sometimes it can be our own hesitation or anxieties holding children back.

How to prepare your child for swimming lessons:

- It might help your child to visit the pool with you first, even to just walk around the pool or to practice changing in the changing room.
- Swimming teachers should know how to help a child with a fear of water. Ask school to discuss this with the leisure centre so you are able to prepare your child for their specific techniques.
- Ask school to get involved with preparing your child i.e. adding swimming lessons to a school schedule or creating a calendar. They could also help the swimming teacher create a bespoke schedule for your child in the pool.
- Asking school to get involved with preparing your child for disappointment. Many pools may need to shut for a day, which is out of the schools control. If school are able to offer an alternative for children in case the pool is closed, this may help them feel less distressed if the situation arises.

- Let your child know what to expect and what will be expected of them via a social story. There are a few social stories that we use Sparkle, which you might want to tailor it to fit your child. We have attached two that you might want to adapt yourself.
- You could add swimming to your home schedule.
- Your child might respond better to pictures. These can be photos that you've taken yourself of your child or of the swimming pool. We have attached the commonly used symbols for swimming lessons.
- You could use objects of reference to help your child understand what they will be doing. These are normally objects that represent an event or activity. An example of these could be a swimming costume or a swimming bag that would represent 'swimming lessons' to your child. By showing them this object you are letting them know that they are going to swimming lessons. You can pick an object that works best with your child.

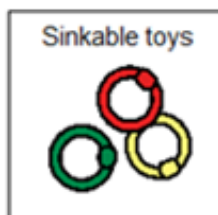
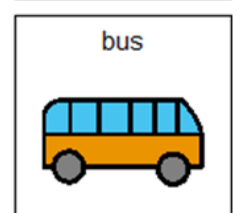
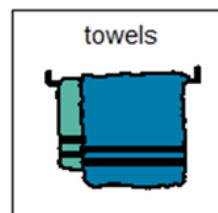
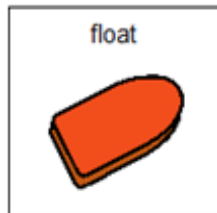
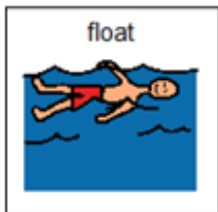
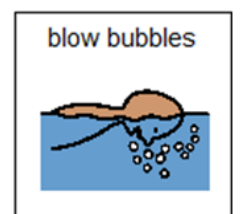
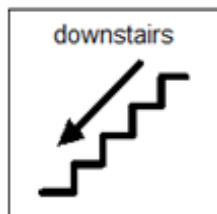
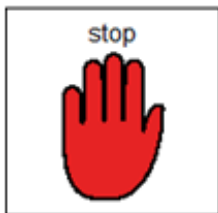
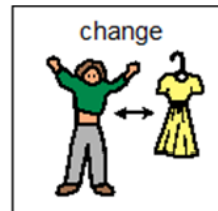
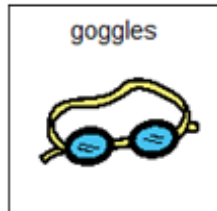
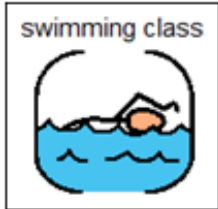
A parent's perspective

“Don't give up. Don't be disheartened if the first couple of sessions aren't what you expect them to be for your child. It takes a long time for typical children to get used to the water and learn to swim. For kids on the spectrum or any sensory difficulties it's going to take them a lot longer to adjust and then learn to swim. It has taken my child 20 weeks to get to a point where he's comfortable - at session ten things changed, like turning a switch on. The swimming instructors persevered and tried new approaches to work out what he needs. The main messages I'd want any parent to know is that just because they are how they are in those first couple of sessions it doesn't mean he isn't going to learn to swim. You have to find what fits and what works for that child – find the motivator that works for them. Focus on the little wins the small steps in positive progress so the child enjoys it and is likely to want to go back”

Quote from a parent of a 7 year old child with Autism.

Useful Symbols

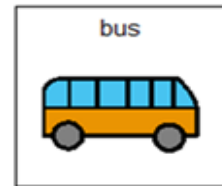
You might see these symbols around, a lot of people use them to help show children what they are going to be doing.



My Swimming Lessons

On _____ I will start swimming lessons at _____.

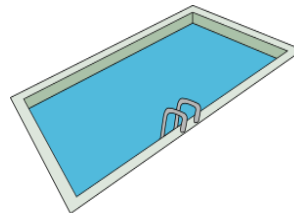
I will arrive at school like I normally do. A bus will take me swimming at _____ o'clock and bring me back at _____ o'clock.



Swimming lessons will start at _____ and finish at _____.

The Swimming instructor is _____.

_____ is in charge of the session. _____ also makes sure everyone is safe and having fun.



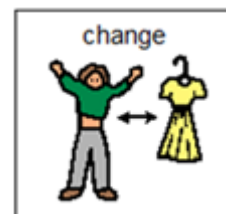
There will be someone in the water to help me.

There will be other children in the pool who might splash water at me a little bit.



There will be _____ other children in the swimming lesson with me.

I will need to get changed in to my bathers before I can go swimming. I can ask _____ for help if I get stuck.



Then I will put my clothes safely in a locker.

The session starts at _____.

I will walk through the shower.

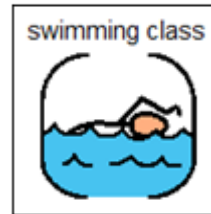


I will use the steps to get in to the water.



I will get my hair wet.

We will all warm up and practice our swimming.



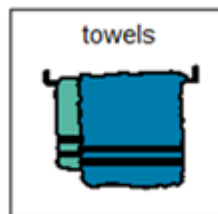
When we finish, we will walk up the stairs to get out of the pool.



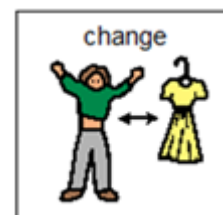
When I get out of the pool, I will have a shower.



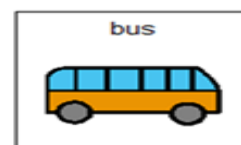
After my shower, I will dry myself.



When I am dry, I can get changed in to my clothes.



Then I will get on the bus and go back to school



My Swimming Lessons

.At the centre, *Insert name & picture* will learn to swim



Swimming lessons will be on _____

The helpers are _____

Lessons will start at _____

Walk through the shower



Walk down the steps to get in the water



We get our hair wet



Swim



Playtime



Swim



Playtime



At _____ we will walk
up the steps



What is swim?

Swim on front



Swim on back



Swim with float



Kick legs

