

ARTICLES BY SUE

COMFORT

This is our most important level and has developed over 20 years of teaching and observations. Every child is different and so different strategies are necessary. We have to plant the seed for some so that they don't 'fail' (in their eyes).

We let them practice at their own pace eg. some may teach the whole lesson to their dolls in the bath. Some may need to be away from the group with no-one watching therefore no pressure, so they can practice at their own pace. Others need to be first and so used to demonstrate.

The aim of the comfort level is to 'feel' the buoyancy. This develops trust of the water. We encourage parents to be in the water so that each child has 30 minutes of learning not 7 minutes (which happens if they have to wait for a teacher and take turns).

Some ideas for very reluctant kids – they need to 'see' their progressions and what skills are expected with different certificates and little steps marked on it -

1. star chart (stickers etc.)
2. their own swimming book
 - exercise book/scrap book etc.
 - they colour, decorate, and stick in pictures after each lesson
 - they bring it weekly to their lesson to show their teacher and/or office staff. We can then add a stamp/sticker with a comment in their book (they must achieve a small challenge which they/teacher can set) and must have the teachers permission to get their 'reward'.

It becomes their bedtime story book.

It helps also to allow them to freely and safely express their feelings (fear, fun, focus, feelings etc).

They may need to try the skills on a secure firm surface eg. edge, platform where **they** are **TOTALLY IN CONTROL!** They need experimenting time.

It feels 'safe' to try the tip of their nose in the water, ear in, etc. This cuts out the 'fear' of their parent 'helping' them (this may take them beyond their level of what they are prepared to try). They may need to do it away from the rest of the class with the teacher and parent **passively** watching and waiting for them to **show you** their new trick.

The noise/visual impact of 'lots' of other kids, teachers and parents can worry them, so give them time to sit and watch (on a chair, pool step, ledge etc) away from the group. They will let you know when they are ready to join the group for songs, games etc. You as the parent can also learn to read their body language and so know when **they are ready** to be gently encouraged to join the activities and the group. Some may be happy to do the song activities but in **their** 'safe' space.

They are all different and their needs and wishes must be respected.