

Swim Free At Three

WABC Hawaii by Sue Mayo 2003©

To understand the expectations and limitations of the 3-year-old we need to look at the entire package deal!

First we look at the **emotional** response of the child in a new environment. Often swimming is the first independent experience. **Socially** we assess the class dynamics. They are conscious of acceptable behavior. So even if one child is not happy or simply not responding in a group situation, this will affect the dynamics of the class.

The physical ability begins to resemble that of an adult. Balance, muscle tone and mobility combine to allow independent swims over a distance comfortably.

The three-year-old displays an increase in skill development from attending a weekly class. The **cognitive** function can understand, interpret and perform, whilst the ability for recall and memory improves.

Through my experience, the only way to expect the best from the three-year-old is to understand the child's personality. In doing so we are able to nurture the emotions of the child to encapsulate the methodology, conducive to learning.

I generally find five different types of personalities. An analogy can be compared with types of birds:

- The finch the timid ones who may fly away at a moments notice.
- The parrots that repeat everything you say.
- The peacocks who show off.
- The kiwi, who only comes out a night. The cautious observer who won't say nor do anything until he feels it is ok to go to do so.
- The hawk who sees and listens to anything and everything, and is in total control of his own actions.

The social interaction assists with attaining the emotional stability. For instance the parrot is encouraged to talk to the finch, the hawk will keep the kiwi company while the peacock will display the skill.

Through singing songs and playing games, within the first five minutes of the class, well trained swim teachers are able to ascertain the correct personality. This creates an opportunity to encourage the three year old to perform 'adaptive' skills through exposure to a wide range of activities and depths of water.

All of our teachers are continually learning and sharing their experiences between teacher, student and parent. The education of the parent is essential to endorse the skills experienced in the 'class room'.

I encourage the 'less is more' principal. The less a teacher supports the child, the more the brain stores balance and buoyancy experiences (vestibular) It has been my experience a child who is encouraged to attempt the skill with minimal support is more likely to initiate. This is imperative for gaining confidence and positive strategies to attempt new skills. Not only in swimming but in other activities at home or in a peer based play.

Deep-water exposure is compulsory in an holistic programme where water safety is a component.

All students experiencing deep water either by walking to it or along a teaching ledge will learn the water we see may look shallow but it isn't. The swimmers are able to transfer observation into experiencing the depth through a 'feet not on the bottom exercise" which may be simply being held out over the deep water through to skills to hold on to the side and move along the wall and back again.

It may be possible to introduce the deep water by walking down our steps and then vertical submersions. The new 3 year old is more comfortable being in a land base position – vertical. Children are born with two fears, loud noises and falling forward. Vestibular, proprioception, visual and tactile stimulation are important factors in the development of the child. As long as the three year old is relaxed, confident and trusting of the teacher the vertical submersion technique is a positive transitional method to allow the three year old to feel floating.

In the long term, these swimmers have a holistic aquatic base to work from to improve and develop in any aquatic activity. However always supervise your children at arms length. **No** child is ever safe in water. Teaching a three year old in an independent environment allows them to be given the opportunity to experience a new medium which is beneficial to the early development of a child in a positive environment.