



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

## BATHTUB SWIM LESSON FOR TODDLERS\*

By Emily Potter-Smith, Valley YMCA Aquatics Director

### Splashing

Gently introducing your young swimmer to water is imperative to having a good relationship with it. Turn this introduction into play time! Using a colander, watering can or a paper cup with holes punched in it, sprinkle water over their head while in the tub. Smile and laugh while doing this, so they associate this activity with positivity. Teach them to wipe their eyes with their hands after getting wet. Progress to poring cups of water over their head and having them wipe their eyes afterwards. This activity will prepare them for their next step, submersions!

### Bubbles

Practice blowing bubbles underwater. Start out with teaching your child how to “blow out candles”, then when they are able to breath out through their mouth, have them try this with their nose. To do nose bubbles, encourage your child to hum and breathe out as they put their nose underwater. You can always have them blow bubbles into your hand by placing your hand just under the surface of the water. If they want a challenge, count how many seconds they can make bubbles!

### Water Hokey Pokey

For very young children, acclimate them to water by playing a game of Water Hokey Pokey. Encourage them to put their chin, ears, mouth, and back of their head in the water. Ex: “We put our right hand in, we take our right hand out...”

### Submerging

Submerging is an important skill in learning to swim. Not approaching this properly can cause unnecessary fear to be associated with this fundamental skill. Start slow, by having them put different parts of their face in the water. Begin with dipping the chin in the water, then move to covering the mouth with water. Next, have them move their head so they can look directly at the bottom, then dip nose in water. Continue this with eyebrows and forehead. Finally, dip entire face in the water. All of this should be done under the child’s own power, so they are controlling the activity. With this method, water avoids going up the nose and scaring the child from going underwater again.

### Back Floats

This can be challenging! Often, young swimmers do not like the feeling of water in their ears. They will become better with practice once they become more desensitized to the feeling. The bathtub is a great place to get in this practice because of the shallow floor. You can start, just like in the pool, with a hand under the head and back. Help your swimmer practice taking slow breath, getting relaxed, and even tipping their head back with a high chin. They will slowly become more independent, and you can add a little more water to the tub to float higher. If you fill the bath tub up with a small amount of water just enough the cover half of their ears it allows them to feel the bottom of the bathtub and lay all the way down. This will encourage them to start getting comfortable with having their ears in the water.

*\*All the skills addressed above are for child confidence in the water. An adult must always be no farther than an arm’s length away from the child when they are in the water. Adult supervision around any water depth is a must for drowning prevention.*