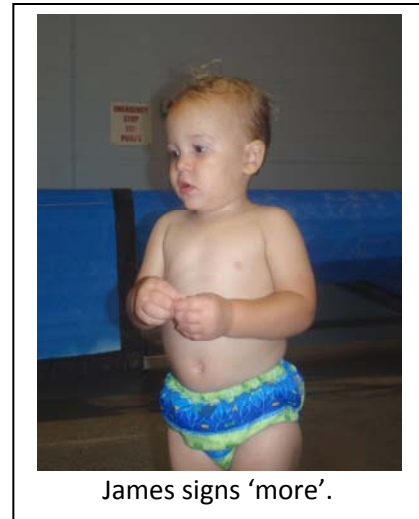


Signing and Swimming

We've all seen them. Those cute little toddlers signing 'more', 'finished', or 'thank you'. It's cute but not really applicable to us—or is it? Can we as swimming instructors incorporate Sign Language into our swimming program? We already use Sign Language in our classes. We use our hands to show the children how we want them to move their arms. We show them where we want their hands when they float. We even use our fingers to simulate a kick. Sign Language can be used both in the water



with our students and on deck with our staff.

Using Sign Language in our classes will benefit the students and teachers.

In recent years Sign Language has gained popularity with parents of small children because of the ease of learning and the benefits for the children. Learning Sign Language helps promote the development of language skills in infants and toddlers. It gives them an easy way to express what they want or need without the

frustration of not being able to speak. Signing uses kinesthetic elements to reinforce verbal language. By signing and speaking at the same time, we have engaged children who are visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners. Learning Sign Language can enhance spatial relationships and reasoning, and cognitive skills development.





Alexa signs 'blue'.

How do we incorporate Sign Language into our lessons? Children learn Sign Language like they do swimming lessons-with repetition and fun! We already use a lot of signs in our lessons. My favorite use of Sign Language is at the end of class when we retrieve colored rings from the bottom of the pool. The children learn all of their colors in sign language. They

love showing off and the parents are so impressed that they can sign the colors before they can say them. We also use signing to help calm or distract an upset child. We keep small rubber animals by the pool and I have taught my children 'duck', 'cat', 'dog', etc to help focus their attention on something else and away from their parent on the other side of the window. I use signs to help redirect a negative behavior. I can sign 'stop', 'sit down', or 'no' from across the pool to correct a behavior without raising my voice or distracting another class.



Ms. Vicki signs 'stop'.

Sign Language can also be beneficial when communicating between staff members. I use sign language to signal a lifeguard or another teacher when I need 'help' at the slide. I can sign that I would like some 'water' or if I need them to bring me a piece of equipment to use in my lesson like 'fins' or a 'kickboard'. The pool area is loud and noisy and signing helps keep a calmer atmosphere without yelling to one another across the pool. We also use 'please', 'thank you' and 'sorry' from time to time in the water.

Even if you don't use actual American Sign Language, you can create your own signs to use in your swim school. Learning Sign Language will be an asset to both your students and your staff. Sign Language and swimming are both skills your students will enjoy for life.