

family



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FATHER'S DIARY

Learning to swim: a family affair

Hold your breath

One of those instinctive reactions we have as parents is to leap to the aid of our kids when they are in danger; many of us unfortunately have learned how easily a young life can be terminated by a wreckless driver or even a wild animal.

And, yes, water too. You've been to the beach and played for hours with your children by the water building sand castles. When you least expect it, you turn to talk to your spouse and your child is running toward the water, running the risk of being swallowed up by the high waves. As you see this event before your eyes and you consider the worst that will happen, you hold your breath. You feel helpless. Will you get down to the water in time to save your child from the danger the child does not perceive? Will the life guard see the child? You can't scream because your body has become unreactive. Somehow, you do move and in seconds run the length of the beach and reach your child after he or she has been forced under the water twice and is in hysterics and tearful. But, your child is safe now.

Reacting to the event, you preach to your child and include a firm swat to the gluteus. You think the combination of preaching and a swat will teach your child a thing or two? Not really. In fact, at the very moment of presenting your style of punishment, your child seems to be holding his or her breath.

Breath normally

One thing parents should never do to children is instill fear without an explanation of why and providing training to cope with a similar situation in the future.

Swimming is a perfect case in point. If a child is made to fear the water because of one bad experience and not given basic training to protect him or herself, he or she may be deprived of years of aquatic recreation activities that could certainly be of a strengthening force both to the body and the mind.

Right now, while we are 11 weeks

before the official beginning of summer and possibly only one day away from going to the nearby YMCA or community pool, get yourself a copy of Dr. John Murray's "Infaquatics—Teaching Kids to Swim," published by William Morrow and Company, Inc. at \$6.95. Whether your child is as young as three months or is old as you would like to be, it's never too late to apply a systems approach to appreciating the water, learning how to swim and generally using the water as a servant of our physical development.

Dr. Murray has mustered lots of supporting evidence to insure us that the teaching of swimming to our children at an early age is a must. After all, Dr. Murray quotes Dr. Frederick Leboyer as saying, "For the baby has emerged from water, the maternal waters that have carried it, caressed and cradled it. Made it light as a bird." That is enough to convince me our kids are born to be swimmers.

Breath Taking

Dr. Murray suggest that while working with your child in a surf free area, you be sure to have him or her facing you at all times. Knowing that kids are great imitators, as they see you do things, they will surely follow. For example, you can begin to submerge an infant's head into the water by both of you getting into the water up to your belly, then shoulders, neck, jaw, mouth, nose, eyes and finally all the way in. This gradual approach will not be fear producing and add substantially toward providing a basic skill in enjoying the water.

Remember when you were being taught how to dive by your mom and dad? I, for one, belly-flopped so many times I refuse to render you a number. I just couldn't grasp the principle of tucking the head under. Let's face it, I was scared to throw my body through the air. If Dr. Murray was around some 25 years ago with his "Infaquatics" book, I guess the learning experience of



With the help of loving parents, this young lady will soon learn to swim.

swimming and diving would have been less traumatic for me.

And after working with your child for several summers, all that Dr. Murray has provided you and your child will be evident. You may be sitting in the bleachers and your child's name is called. She proudly climbs the ladder to the 15 foot diving board, calculates her dive, and then thrusts her body above and away from the board as she enters into a set of a front two and one-half somersault with a pike. You hold your breath but you know before you

is a breath-taking experience. With all the confidence and skill that can be afforded your child and with the help and dedication you have provided, the water has become a tool of your child's aquatic success mechanism.

Dr. Murray summarizes his book quite fittingly: "Children must be helped to survive the future, maintain healthy bodies and enjoy one of God's greatest gifts to mankind—water. But, another of God's greatest gifts are loving parents who teach their children to swim."