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The Challenging Challenge

How much and how often should you ask a child to perform different tasks in water?



Make the activity fun and interesting. Use distractions and build the learner's confidence in their own ability.

By Barbara Nolan

How much is EXACTLY right for this child right now?

Judging how far, how much and how often you ask a child to perform different tasks in water, and judging exactly what's right for each individual child, is a skill that comes with time and experience.

Under challenging the learner can result in slow or no progress.

Not only that, these children tend to get bored and find other ways to amuse themselves, such as jumping around, splashing, finding something else in the pool to do and generally not paying attention to the teacher!

At the other end of the scale, over challenging can also cause problems.

Setting a challenge that exceeds a learner's emotional needs, physical capabilities or level of cognition can cause the learner to become apprehensive or frightened. This apprehension becomes a distraction, which also hinders learning.

Over challenging can lead to the learner becoming discouraged and losing interest.

Confidence levels can plummet as the child starts to think "it's all too hard" or "I'm hopeless". Their desire to return and to learn starts to diminish.

Over challenging can also lead to skill break down, with too much time spent practicing incorrect and inefficient movements.

Somewhere between the two sits a place that's just right for each child.

Finding exactly where that place is, for every child, in every lesson, week in and week out, can be challenging, but it's a necessary skill for effective teaching.

To help you find that "place", where maximum learning happens, we'll use the analogy of a set of traffic lights. We all know a red light means STOP, amber means caution and green means GO!

Build confidence in their own ability

Green Light Clues = GO!

When you see the following green light clues the child is usually ready for you to increase the challenge.



1. Relaxed muscles.
2. Happy face and smiling eyes.
3. Enjoyment and enthusiasm.
4. Becoming independent and wanting to perform the activity without help.
5. The child finds the activity fun, exciting and has little difficulty performing the requested tasks.

These are all signs that it's time to increase the challenge for this particular child.

Amber Light Clues = CAUTION!

When you see the following amber light clues you need to go a little slower.



1. A little unsure, and looking questioningly at the teacher or parent.
2. Hesitation.
3. Frowning and looking for the teachers' support. They may make comments such as "I can't do that."
4. Holding back and looking at their parent for reassurance.
5. Slight increase in muscle tension.

Amber light clues do not say stop, they simply say go cautiously and use your imagination. Make the activity fun and interesting. Use distractions and build the learner's confidence in their own ability.

Demonstrate your own confidence in their ability by using words such as, "Wow, that's clever!" or "Wow, this is fun!" (Make sure it is fun!).

Acknowledge every effort and celebrate small achievements. Amber light children need you to believe they can do it. Encourage and support them through this uncertain time.

Red Light Clues = STOP!

When you see the following red light clues you are about to embark on unproductive teaching time.



1. Extreme muscle tension.
2. Very stressed facial expression.
3. Crying or whimpering.
4. Struggling and tightly clutching the teacher.
5. Trying to get away by climbing out of the pool or locking themselves onto the edge.

Whatever the reason, red light clues are telling you that you're about to embark on nonproductive, disrespectful teaching time. Move back to amber, offer the support and encouragement needed by the child at this point in time, and very soon you'll have that green light again.

STOP!

- Muscle tension
- Very stressed facial expression
- Crying or whimpering
- Struggling and clutching
- Trying to get away

CAUTION!

- Unsure and hesitating
- Frowning and looking for support
- "I can't do that."
- Holding back
- Slight increase in muscle tension

GO!

- Relaxed muscles
- Happy face and smiling eyes
- Enjoyment and enthusiasm
- Independent
- Finds the activity fun, exciting and has little difficulty