

# AquaSquirts

A PLAY-BASED WATER-ORIENTATION PROGRAM TO  
DEVELOP SWIMMING SKILLS BY SYNCHRO CANADA

## *AquaSquirts for Little Squirts*

**Adapting AquaSquirts  
for Younger or Less Skilled Swimmers**



# *AquaSquirts for Little Squirts*

## *Acknowledgements*

A special thank you to Krista Benoit, Frances Parker, and Sandy Simunovic for reviewing the final product, as well as for their ongoing support of the AquaSquirts programs.

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- Irene Van Hooft — writing
- Wendy White Morrow — writing
- Louise Wood — editing and layout

## *Dedication*

*AquaSquirts for Little Squirts* is dedicated to the memory of Karen Shank, former Project Manager, Water Safety Revisions, for the Canadian Red Cross. Karen was devoted to improving the swimming experience of Canadian children. Her enthusiasm, expertise, and guidance made an enormous positive contribution to both the new Swim Kids program for Red Cross and the AquaSquirts partnership with Synchro Canada. We sincerely believe that the energy Karen devoted to her work will shine in the eyes of the children who participate in these programs.



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Canadian Heritage  
Patrimoine canadien  
Sport Canada

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# *All about AquaSquirts for Little Squirts*

## *Introduction*

*AquaSquirts for Little Squirts* shows you and other AquaSquirts Instructors (Red Cross Water Safety Instructors and Synchro Instructors) how to adapt the AquaSquirts play-based sessions for younger or less skilled swimmers. It includes specific suggestions for modifications you can make with swimmers who are 3 to 6 years old. It also provides tips on adjusting your classes for swimmers whose skills don't meet recommended minimums, for example, they can't float on their front and back, or they can't move comfortably in chest-deep water.

There are two kinds of teaching information in *AquaSquirts for Little Squirts*:

- Adaptations** – suggestions for ways you can alter AquaSquirts for younger or less skilled swimmers.
- Additional Activities** – suggestions for other activities you can use with this group. When you work with younger swimmers, you'll often find that activities take a lot less time than they do with older swimmers. That's why we've included a number of activities designed specifically for little squirts.

## *How to Use AquaSquirts for Little Squirts*

For ease of use, the material in *AquaSquirts for Little Squirts* lines up as closely as possible with that in the *AquaSquirts Instructor's Guide*:

- Each teaching session in *AquaSquirts for Little Squirts* is one page long, and it corresponds to the session of the same name in the *AquaSquirts Instructor's Guide*.
- The material in each *AquaSquirts for Little Squirt* session uses the same headings as the material in the corresponding *Instructor's Guide* session.
- The material in each *AquaSquirts for Little Squirt* session is in the same order as the material in the corresponding *Instructor's Guide* session.

There are two main ways to use the information in *AquaSquirts for Little Squirts*:

- You can keep all the pages of *AquaSquirts for Little Squirts* together.
- You can keep each *AquaSquirts for Little Squirts* page with the corresponding session in the *Instructor's Guide*. For example, you could put the Session #1 page with the Session #1 section in the *AquaSquirts Instructor's Guide*.

Of course, what you do depends totally on what works for you as an AquaSquirts Instructor. Just remember to ...

## *Be Creative!*

As an AquaSquirts Instructor, you have to be creative and adaptable. Using your imagination makes the AquaSquirts class the fun that it is. So go ahead and make it fun for this new group of swimmers — if you can capture their interest and motivate them to participate in aquatic activities, that's a job well-done!

## *Feedback*

If you have suggestions or questions regarding any of the AquaSquirts programs (AquaSquirts, AquaSquirts Too, and AquaSquirts for Little Squirts), please contact us at:

[info@aquasquirts.ca](mailto:info@aquasquirts.ca)

# Session #1 Let's Float!

## Adaptations

- Equipment.** Have swimmers use additional flotation devices such as lifejackets, noodles, runners' buoys, bottles, or flutterboards for the following:
  - Floating (Main Lesson)
  - Fun with Body Shapes (Main Lesson)
  - Partner Accordions (Additional Activities)
  - Floating Raft (Additional Activities)
- Creative Entry in the Deep End.** AVOID unless all swimmers are wearing PFDs.
- Fun with Body Shapes (Main Lesson):**
  - Use more animals and fewer letters for the shapes.
  - Instead of counting, make the sound of the next animal to change position.
  - If swimmers need an activity to warm up, have the class do the barnyard walk, where swimmers follow one another around the shallow end, making their animal noises. This could progress to animal actions — swim like a duck, paddle like a dog, kick like a donkey, run like a horse etc.. Swimmers can also vary their speed — walk like a tired cow, scurry like a busy chicken, waddle like a duck, etc.
- Stationary Scull (Main Lesson).** To get the sculling motion started, have swimmers move as if they're smearing finger paint on the top of the water.
- Raggedy Ann and the Tin Soldier (Main Lesson):**
  - Swimmers start this activity in a shallow pool or at a beach where they can still touch the bottom.
  - Swimmers move **slowly** to slightly deeper water.
  - If you want to stick with the animal theme, call this activity *The Giraffe and the Jellyfish* (long, stretched giraffe and loose, floppy jellyfish).

### Teaching Tip

- The use of fun, colourful water toys, such as rings, plastic animals/fish can also be a helpful addition for the younger swimmers. A completely "animal" theme works well throughout the session!

### Teaching Tip

- If your pool has access to floating animal toys, swimmers could use them as water buddies for some of these skills. For example, in stationary sculling, have swimmers rest a toy on top of their tummy, and ask them to see if they can keep their animal buddy still!

## Additional Activities

- Copy Cat:** One swimmer floats like an animal of his or her choice, all the other swimmers copy the float. Each swimmer gets a turn being the leader.
- Float to the Buoy:** One at a time, swimmers float on their back from the wall to the buoy (you!); the other swimmers stay at the wall. When swimmers reach you, spin them around and send them home to the wall on their tummies with their arms reaching in front. Try to make some neat noise as you spin them around, and get the swimmers at the wall to make the noise with you!
- Duck, duck, goose floats:** Swimmers stand in a circle in shallow water. Walk around the outside of the circle, and tap each swimmer on the head while saying either "Duck, duck" or "Goose." When you say "Duck, duck," swimmers do their favourite float, quack three times, and then stand up again. When you say "Goose," swimmers try to touch the bottom of the pool, and they say "Honk" very loudly when they come up. Keep going around the circle until everyone has "quacked" or "honked" once.

## Session #2: Let's Go Underwater!

### General Tips

- Since swimmers are going underwater, they're going to need noseclips. The best way to handle this with very young swimmers is for you to put clips on the swimmers and for them to leave them on! Using noseclips with attached strings also cuts down on the time you spend chasing ones that fall off!
- Basing activities on characters from popular children's movies works really well with these swimmers. Big favourites include Little Mermaid, Finding Nemo, Shark Tales, and Sponge Bob Square Pants. And if you have access to music, add the tunes!
- This is also a great session for underwater pictures. If you have an assistant, have him or her take shots during the Tea Party or Funny Face Activity. Then swimmers can take their picture home after the show (see Session #9). Be sure to check waiver requirements before taking any pictures.
- This whole session works really well in a shallow pool/kiddy pool or at a beach. Swimmers don't have to go deep to practice going underwater.

### Adaptations

- Going Down! (Main Lesson):**
  - Have swimmers try to end up sitting on the bottom. They won't really be nice and straight, but not being floppy helps.
  - If you're using movie themes, swimmers could sit combing their hair like Ariel, washing whales like Oscar (with you as the whale), etc.
- Changing Shapes (Main Lesson):** AVOID.
- Underwater Leap Frog (Main Lesson):** Have swimmers on the surface hold a flutterboard to their belly.
- Musical Hoops (Main Lesson):** When you remove the hoops, don't eliminate swimmers. Instead, have all the remaining swimmers try to share hoops. At the end, ALL swimmers are trying to cooperate and put a foot into the one remaining hoop (or their whole body if the class is small).
- Hula Hoop Obstacle Course (Main Lesson):** Do this activity only in the shallow end.

### Additional Activities

- Jack in the Box (or a theme name such as Oscar, Nimo, or Ariel):** Each swimmer crouches in the middle of a hula hoop, with just his or her mouth out of the water, and shows you what a Jack in the Box looks like. Swimmers then sing the following to the tune of Pop Goes the Weasel, and when they sing Pop, they jump up as high as possible and then submerge in their hoop. Swimmers can repeat the song, while moving slowly in a circle as they sing the first part of the song:
  - Round and round the swimming pool, the porpoise chased the dolphin
  - The porpoise stopped to pick up a ring, POP goes the dolphin! (Swimmers can also pick up rings at the same time)
- Underwater Tea Party:**
  - Partner up swimmers and have them try to sit on the bottom of the pool with a friend. Swimmers face each other and have a tea party. They surface as needed for air.
  - Swimmers can also try saying HI by doing a partner handshake, high five, or other short clapping game. It's best to practice these at the surface first. Swimmers could also invent their own greeting!
- Funny Faces Telephone Game:** Swimmers stand in a circle in shallow water. The leader goes underwater and makes a funny face at his or her neighbour. The neighbour passes on the funny face to the next person. Once everyone has passed on the face, they all stand up, look at one another, and make the face on the count of three. Did the face change as it went around?

## Session #3: Let's Go Upside Down!

### General Tip

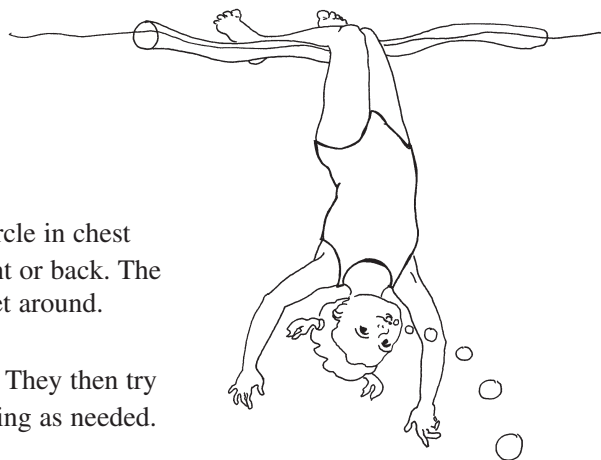
- ❑ These little squirts seem to want to spend the whole time underwater and upside down! Just remember that swimmers don't HAVE to do a specific task. The main idea is for them to participate and have fun while trying new things.
- ❑ In a shallow pool or kiddy pool, you'll have to be extra careful to protect swimmers' heads so they don't hit the bottom during upside-down work.

### Adaptations

- ❑ **Underwater Obstacle Course (Review):** Do only in the shallow end.
- ❑ **Experiment (Main Lesson):** Give swimmers lots of time to try to get upside down; touch their toes, and pick up items from the bottom of the pool.
- ❑ **Handstands (Main Lesson):** Have swimmers make shapes with their legs if they aren't familiar with letters. Suggest circles, bird wings, elephant ears, etc. And have swimmers try to "clap their feet."
- ❑ **Bat Hangs (Main Lesson):** Be sure to help swimmers curl back. Protect their heads — they tend to want to go backward head first!

### Teaching Tip

- Basing activities on characters from popular children's movies works really well with these swimmers. Big favourites include Little Mermaid, Finding Nemo, Shark Tales, and Sponge Bob Square Pants. And if you have access to music, add the tunes!



### Additional Activities

- ❑ **Chain Reaction Somersaults:** Swimmers hold hands in a circle in chest deep water. The first swimmer does a somersault, either front or back. The swimmers on either side help the somersaulting swimmer get around. Once the first swimmer is done, the next swimmer goes.
- ❑ **Wheelbarrow:** Swimmers put their feet on a floating object. They then try to walk their hands along the bottom across the pool, breathing as needed. This is best done in VERY shallow water.
- ❑ **Hopscotch:** Arrange a pattern for swimmers to hop through. Place items for them to pick up on different spaces. Swimmers try to clap their feet in the air when they grab an item.
- ❑ **Cartwheels:** If your session is at a beach, swimmers can do cartwheels in the water.

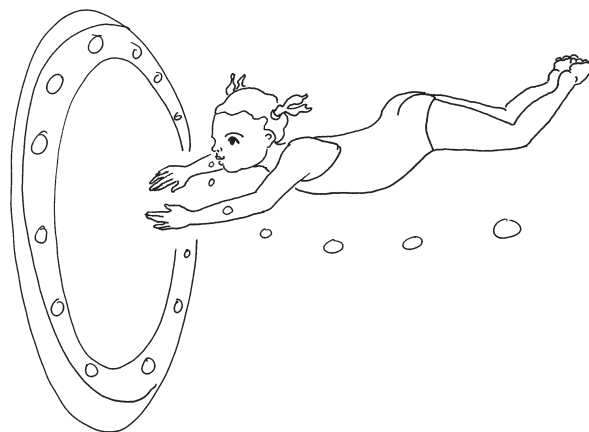
## Session #4: Let's Move in Water!

### Adaptations

- Equipment.** Have swimmers use additional flotation devices such as lifejackets, noodles, runners' buoys, bottles, or flutterboards for the following:
  - Head-first Scull (Main Lesson)
  - Eggbeater (Main Lesson)
  - Dolphin Kick (Main Lesson)
  - Mini-sequence (Additional Activities)
- Widths and Strokes (Warm-up):** Use appropriate methods and distances for your swimmers: walking across the pool with arms any way they want (for instance, rowing their boat, clapping front and back, flapping like a duck, or reaching to pick apples), kicking with a lifejacket, etc. You can also have swimmers use animal toys (water buddies) to ride the flutterboard with them, mark their spot at the wall, etc.
- Eggbeater (Main Lesson):** If you're in a shallow pool or at a beach, eggbeater may be very difficult. But you can still introduce the idea by having swimmers sit at the pool edge or at the edge of a chair seat. Put some chairs in the pool, and have swimmers sit right on the edge of the seat and try the leg motion.
- Swimming Upright in Deeper Water (Main Lesson):** Do only in the shallow end.
- Hunting for Shipwrecks! (Main Lesson):** Swimmers stay along the shallowest part of the pool and use the edge to get from one hoop to the next.

#### Teaching Tip

- If you use two groups to stagger the start, use some fun names of things they like for the groups: waffles and syrup, cheerios and alphabets, milk and cookies, crackers and peanut butter, etc.



### Additional Activities

- Tag!** Stay in the shallowest part of pool. The swimmer who is It uses a mask or goggles. Swimmers who float "like a giraffe" (back layout) become invisible, and It has to walk away from them. You might have to be It if swimmers are too good at layouts, or It will never change!
- Boat Builders:** Swimmers build a boat from various pool items and then try to turn it into a shipwreck to explore the sunken parts. Some of the pool items must be able to sink!
- Ring around the Rosie with Eggbeater:** Use float assistants as needed. Instead of falling down, swimmers do floats or put their face in the water and blow bubbles.

## Session #5: Let's Go to the Regatta!

### General Tip

- ❑ Swimmers will find it easier to make boat positions in the shallowest water. If your class is at a shallow pool or beach and it's too shallow to move for a parade, just show boats one at a time.

### Adaptations

- ❑ **Equipment.** Have swimmers use additional flotation devices such as lifejackets, noodles, runners' buoys, bottles, or flutterboards for the following:
  - How Do Boats Get into the Water?, Create a Boat, Guess Which Boat? (Main Lesson)
  - Parade (Main Lesson)
  - Regatta Mini-sequence (Main Lesson)
- ❑ **Widths (Warm-up):** Use appropriate methods and distances for your swimmers: walking across the pool with arms any way they want, kicking with a lifejacket, etc.
  - **Motorboat Game.** In shallow water, form a circle with the swimmers. Everyone starts walking in a slow circle and chanting "Motorboat, Motorboat go sooooo sloooooow, (walk gets faster) motorboat motorboat go so fast, (swimmers try to run) motorboat, motorboat step on the gas!" Swimmers then repeat the game in the opposite direction.
- ❑ **Create a Boat (Main Lesson):** This time, make sure all the items used to make the boat can float (compare with Boat Builders in Session #4).
- ❑ **Regatta Mini-sequence (Main Lesson):** Linking skills will probably be a new experience for swimmers. Start slowly, going from raft to tugboat, using the word "GO" to get them to move to the next position. Or use the names you make up for positions as the cue to move.
  - A great way for them to learn is to make up a little song with the order of the sequence- Try this to the tune of I'm a Little Teapot, or make up your own:
    - I'm a little raft now, long and straight,  
Winding down the river, I feel great!
    - Scrunch me up 'n watch me float, A tug  
today, waving and smiling all the way
    - Hoist my sail, watch me float, Time to  
play, laughing and waving all the way!
  - Or try this to the tune of Row, Row, Row,  
Your Boat:
    - Scull, scull, scull your raft, all the way  
to me
    - Scrunch to tub, and turn around, happy  
as can be!

#### Teaching Tip

- > The waving action makes them move head first. If swimmers are using lifejackets, you can gently pull on the back to help with propulsion.

#### Teaching Tip

- > Swimmers go in pairs, and you're in the water too. You may have to help them turn around. If they're using lifejackets, you can gently guide the back of the jacket into a turn.

### Additional Activities

- ❑ **Bumper Boats:** Swimmers make their favorite boat. When you touch the swimmer, he or she has to try to change direction: head first, foot first, or turn in a bit of a circle! Use a noodle to bump the swimmers. Keep an eye out for swimmers about to bump each other and turn them to safety.
- ❑ **Blast Off:** Counting backward from 5, have swimmers blast off in different ways:
  - From a crouch to a standing position with the arms pointing to the sky
  - From the wall to back layout
  - Backward blast, where swimmers start in a back layout and blast into tight little balls that roll and somersault.

## Session #6: Let's Visit Sea Creatures!

### General Tip

- This session has very few adaptations. Sea creatures are very easily adapted for the age of the swimmer or your pool situation. This also tends to be one of swimmers' favourite lessons, so you won't usually need too many additional activities — they'll be very happy to keep being more sea creatures!
- If you have access to music, songs like Under the Sea from The Little Mermaid soundtrack would be fun to play during the warm-up.

### Adaptations

- Equipment.** Have swimmers use additional flotation devices such as lifejackets, noodles, runners' buoys, bottles, or flutterboards for the following:
  - Warm-up (any boats that need support)
  - Sea Creatures as needed (Main Lesson)
- Sea Creatures (Main Lesson):**
  - Watch swimmers closely when they do entries in shallow water.
  - If your class is in a shallow pool or at a beach, ask swimmers to make more shallow-water sea creatures than deep-water sea creatures, for example, more crabs, lobsters, and turtles and not as many sharks and whales.

### Additional Activities

- Simon Says Sea Creatures!** Play Simon Says, and have swimmers turn into different sea creatures. For example, Simon Says "Be an octopus with the hiccups!" Be a frog with an itch," "Be a dolphin that can clap, or "Be a barking seal."
- Peek a Boo:** Hold a hula hoop up and pretend it's the Observation Window of the Sea Life Centre. As swimmers get past the observation window, they get to be their favourite sea creature for the class.



## Session #7: Let's Have Fun with Patterns!

### General Tip

- If your class is in a shallow pool or at a beach, swimmers can sit on the bottom instead of standing when trying to make different shapes.

### Adaptations

- Equipment.** Have swimmers use additional flotation devices such as lifejackets, noodles, runners' buoys, bottles, or flutterboards for the following:
  - Regatta Mini-sequence (Main Lesson)
  - Pattern Changes (Main Lesson)
- Questions for Swimmers (Main Lesson):** Have some toys with you that show different shapes — balls, hoops, blocks, triangles, etc. Swimmers can create most of these shapes while standing on the pool bottom. You can also place bricks on the bottom as markers to get them into their pattern.
- Pattern Changes Underwater (In Deeper Water) (Main Lesson): Do only in the shallow end.

### Additional Activities

- Musical Patterns with Bricks:** Place bricks on the pool bottom in a circle, one brick for each swimmer. Play music or sing as swimmers move around the circle. When the song is over, they all stand on a brick. Remove one or two bricks and make a new pattern, for example, a square. When the music stops this time, some swimmers will have to share a brick! Sing to the tune of Here We Go 'Round the Mulberry Bush:
  - "Here we go 'round the circle, circle, circle. Here we go' round the circle on a wonderful day in the pool!"
  - "Here we go round the square..."
  - "Here we go round the triangle..."
- Partner Up:** Swimmers try to make a shape for their partner with their body (a circle, a star, etc.). You can also use a favourite cereal as a theme for the shapes: Cheerios, Shreddies, Alphabets, etc. The partner copies the shape, and then both swimmers try to make the same shape together!
- London Bridge Line:** Swimmers join hands in a circle. They walk in as far as they can until all hands touch. Swimmers then walk out, making the circle as big as possible. Then you let go and pull swimmers out into a line (stay in the shallow end!). Then lead the line back around to the last set of joined arms and loop under the arms, keeping all hands joined. The whole line will eventually walk under the bridge except for the last two swimmers!

#### Teaching Tip

- You could also switch to a circus theme, and have swimmers make their animal sound when they get to the brick. Change the song to "Here we go round the circus ring...on a wonderful day at the circus." Or use animals from the farm, the zoo (using a winding path) etc.

## *Session #8: Let's Go Team!*

### *General Tips*

- This lesson has very few adaptations we can suggest. This is an opportunity for you to create some mini-sequences with swimmers based on what they've enjoyed and accomplished up to this point in the sessions. In other words, what you do in this session depends on what has worked with your swimmers so far.
- Continue to keep safety at the front of your mind. Have swimmers use additional floats as needed.
- Counting is not required, but having cues about when to do the next move will make performances go much smoother. Singing songs is an ideal way to cue younger swimmers. Get creative- and adapt a few nursery rhymes!
  - For example, for a warm-up exercise, modify the rhyme "Jack be nimble, Jack be quick, Jack jump over the candle stick" by changing the words to "Jack walk slow, Jack walk quick, Jack jump over the diving stick" and use the swimmer's name instead of Jack's.

## *Session #9: Let's Give a Show!*

The session lets swimmers show off their skills.

### *Main Lesson:*

- For the Main Lesson, choose skills that swimmers have enjoyed and performed well. If you used float assists before, be sure to use them now.
- Have swimmers also play a few of their favourite games from earlier sessions.

### *Demonstration:*

- Be sure to sing your songs loudly. You may want to repeat the mini-sequence a few times. That will allow everyone to get it right at least once!

### *Award Presentation:*

- Be sure to have AquaSquirts certificates and the colourful Squirt stickers on hand to give to every swimmer.
- For additional handouts, go to [www.aquasquirts.ca](http://www.aquasquirts.ca) or contact us at [info@aquasquirts.ca](mailto:info@aquasquirts.ca) for complementary promotional items for swimmers.

Congratulations! You've had a successful AquaSquirts class with younger swimmers!

