



When Can I Expect My Child to do 'Big Arms.'

This is a question I have been asked a lot over the last thirty seven years. The answer to the question lies in an understanding of what makes us move through the water when we swim.

To understand the mechanics of moving through the water let me draw your attention to what happens when you walk. When you put your foot on the ground it stays in the one place and your body moves forward. If this was not the case you would stay in the one spot, you would not move.

The same happens in the water. When you are swimming technically correct your hand stays in the one spot relative to the bottom and sides of the pool and your body moves over your hand, the same as your body moves over your foot when you walk. If your hand slips back through the water you will stay in the one spot.

In order for your hands to hold the water, like your foot holds the ground, you have to learn to scull (hold the water) with your hands and feet. You may know the term sculling as paddling. Until a pupils can hold the water with their hands it is a waste of time trying to get them to do big arms, as this makes it increasingly difficult for a pupil to learn to scull, because the action of the hand hitting the water as a result of doing big arms cause the pupils hand to slip (lose the grip on the water - sculling) at the front end of the stroke. So until a pupil can scull correctly and apply enough pressure on the water (down force on the water while their hands are under the water and out in front of them), so they can lift their lips out of the water to get a breath it is a waste of time starting on big arms. By introducing big arms into the equation too soon it slows down the learn to swim process dramatically, and of course in the long term cost more.

Getting a pupil to do big arms is very easy if you introduce this skill at the correct time. If you try to get a pupil to do big arms before they have developed their sculling (holding the water) skills then the pupil will struggle in the water. Think of big arms as the icing on the cake; not the flour, eggs, sugar and milk. The icing is the easy part and only takes a little while. It is the preparing and baking the cake that takes the time.

All my teachers understand this principle; but feel sometimes feel pressured from some parents to get the child to do big arms. Please be patient while your child develops the feel for the water first, and can hold the water with their hand to such a degree they can lift their lips gently out of the water and take a breath. Then and only then is it time to introduce big arms.

— Chris Shapland

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