

How to use Motor Skill Check-In Cards for your Swimming Program



1. Use these cards to help check-in & understand each child’s strengths during your swimming program.
2. Trust your judgment with scoring! This tool is just meant to help you decide practice activities.
3. Identify strengths and emerging skills for each child. Assign home-based practice activities by walking with families to determine meaningful goals.



Auditory Adaptations

Auditory Adaptations for noise sensitivity:

- Use visual cues instead of sounds (switch out a whistle for visual cues).
- Use headphones for noise reduction if child is sensitive to louder sounds.

Adaptations for Hearing Impairment:

- Use visual cues instead of verbal (arm up instead of “go!”).
- Use a white board & marker to draw pictures/ write out instructions
- Ensure you are facing the child and mouth is visible when speaking.
- Model each step of instruction.
- Learn some basic American Sign Language (ASL) to utilize throughout instruction.



Adaptations for Participation & Overwhelm

If the child is not interested in participating:

- Change it up! Ask them what they’d like to do & incorporate it into the task
- Be creative, alter your description of the activity to incorporate what the child is interested in.
- Provide incentives (stickers, a preferred game).

If the child is feeling overwhelmed:

- Make sure they’re safe.
- Provide wait time & give space.
- Speak calmly & occasionally (check-ins as opposed to constant talk).
- Use visuals.
- Offer the child their own personal items that might help them regulate.



Warm-up

1. **Start with introductions, rules & review the shape-of-the day (schedule)**
 - “What is your name and favourite... (food, show, etc.)”.
 - Work with the child/children to establish & develop the rules.
 - Utilize visual schedules or choice charts (available on KidsAction.ca) to have the child/children choose what order the activities will go in.
 - Encourage each child’s participation & input.

2. Stretches

It’s time to get the body moving! Choose 2 of each:

Stationary Stretches:

- Hip Circles
- Touch Your Toes
- Arm Circles

Dynamic Stretches:

- Marching on the spot
- Side Shuffle
- Lunges

3. Warm-Up Games

Play a quick game to get the group moving.



Balance (Static)

Raven on a perch

Pretend to be a Raven perched on one leg. Keep your wings spread wide to balance!

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Excessive arm movement ○ Limited time spent on one leg |
| 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Needs stability support from wall or instructor |
| 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Arm held tightly against the body ○ Eyes focused on feet ○ Able to stand on one foot with some body movement |
| 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Arms extended but not moving ○ Eyes focused forward |
| 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Free leg held away from the body with little movement |

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Balance (Dynamic)

Bear Balance beam

Pretend you’re a bear and walk along a narrow log across the river. Use your arms to keep your balance!

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Excessive arm movement ○ Upper body is tense and stiff ○ Foot movements slow/shuffles |
| 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Needs constant rail/instructor support |
| 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Arms are overused to maintain balance ○ Difficulty maintaining balance ○ Use of both feet but steps are uneven |
| 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Eyes focused forward ○ Feet and arm move in opposite directions |
| 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Balanced walking in multiple directions (forward, backward, sideways) without support |

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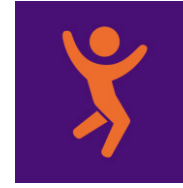
Vestibular Adaptations Our Vestibular system influences our sense of balance, spatial awareness and coordination. Some individuals with NDDs may have vestibular sensitivities or alternatively, may have a higher threshold for vestibular activities. Simple Vestibular Adaptations: - Start with slower activities, such as tightening or loosening bindings - Include warm-ups or activities that incorporate controlled rolling, jumping, or spinning. - Be observant and look at what each child prefers, responds to positively or avoids. 	Visual Adaptations Simple Visual Adaptations: - Utilize visual schedules, “first, then” boards or choice charts (available on KidsAction.ca). - Bring out one activity at a time. - Use visual timers. Adaptations for Visual Impairment: - Use a bell or other instruments to help indicate the location of the space that they should move towards. - Allow time for the child to become familiar with the space by walking in the water and exploring their surroundings. - Use large, high-contrast visual signs to clearly show where to go or where to meet. 	Helpful Tips - Remember to test both sides as a child might be better on one side versus the other! - Be confident: this tool is just here to help you make choices for at-home practice activities. - Model the action, do it together, and then have the child/children try the action independently. - If skills(s) are not addressed during assessment, place “N/A” into the correct cell on the corresponding Motor Skills Scoring Chart. - The benefits of this practice exceeds swimming skills. Helping children improve their motor skills will aid in their general physical activity – but will also impact aspects of their daily life, cognition, emotion, and more. 
Balance (Dynamic)  Set up: - Have participants stand a few feet apart Activity Instructions: Younger: Pretend you’re a bear crossing a log, take slow, heavy steps with arms out wide for balance. Experienced: Walk smoothly across the pool, trying side steps or backward steps without using the wall To increase or decrease difficulty: - Start with rail/instructor support, then progress to hands-free - Change directions (sideways, backward) for challenge - Increase speed or add gentle arm movements	Balance (Static)  Set up: - Safe pool deck space or shallow water area. - Have support (wall, instructor, or float) nearby for safety. Activity Instructions: Younger: Pretend to be a raven standing on one leg. Use arms like wings for balance. Experienced: Try one-leg balance without using arms, or close eyes for extra challenge. To increase or decrease difficulty: - Practice in shallow water vs. on deck. - Use one hand on the wall, then progress to hands-free. - Add variations: hold for longer time, switch legs, or add gentle arm movements.	Cool-down 1. Class Engagement - Coach can prompt class to share their favourite part of the day. - Celebrate the athlete’s progression towards their goals! 2. Team Cheer End the class with a fun cheer or song to get the children excited for the next session! You can do a simple “go team!” or choose one of the songs below: - CoComelon Nursery Rhymes - Row, Row, Row Your Boat - Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes 
Find at-home Physical Activity Bank suggestions for this skill under “Balance” on KidsAction.ca	Find at-home Physical Activity Bank suggestions for this skill under “Balance” on KidsAction.ca	

Kicking(Front) Porpoise Flutter Kick Pretend you're making waves like a porpoise! Kick your legs straight to move the water. 1 ○ Knees bend excessively ○ No hip movement involved ○ Minimal splash created 2 ○ Multiple kicks in sequence 3 ○ Some hip engagement but uneven rhythm 4 ○ Alternates between bent and straight legs 5 ○ Strong, efficient kicks from the hips ○ Legs remain straight and coordinated ○ Creates forward propulsion or sustained movement	Jumping Orca Splash Jump Jump like an orca diving in. Use both legs to spring up from the pool bottom or pool edge! 1 ○ Needs support to balance ○ Unable to perform jump due to poor form ○ Steps or slides carefully into shallow water 2 ○ Small jump from edge of the pool into shallow water 3 ○ Unstable jump, requires many stabilizing movements 4 ○ Confidently jumps from edge of the pool ○ Both legs push together with control 5 ○ Completely leaves the bottom of the pool or wall	Hand-Eye Coordination Target Splash Pretend your hands are water blasters! Reach forward and push the water to hit a target. 1 ○ Poor hand control ○ Random splashing without aiming ○ Limited coordination between eyes and hands 2 ○ Moderate accuracy 3 ○ Some successful splashing at target 4 ○ Consistent and coordinated aiming 5 ○ Completely leaves the bottom of the pool or wall
November 2025  Catching/Targeting Treasure Grab Pretend you're a diver collecting treasure! Reach out and grab toys before they drift away. 1 ○ Misses toys completely ○ Arms trap against chest ○ Poor hand positioning 2 ○ Extends arms forward but timing off 3 ○ Requires multiple tries for success 4 ○ Difficulty maintaining balance 5 ○ Smooth, accurate grabs with one or both hands ○ Purposeful reach with both hands	November 2025  Striking Seal Slap Pretend you're a seal clapping. Move your hands back and forth to make a splash ! 1 ○ Before the strike, elbow is bent in front of the body then straightens out during the strike ○ Arm moves vertically & makes a chop like action 2 ○ Moderate flat-hand sweeps across the water 3 ○ Elbow is held close to the body with a slight bend ○ Feet are shoulder width apart ○ Coordination inconsistent 4 ○ Consistent rhythmic movement with both hands 5 ○ Weight transfers from back to front	November 2025  Hopping Frog Hop Pretend you're a frog leaping out of the pond! Push with both legs together to hop up. 1 ○ Upper and lower body asynchrony ○ Inconsistent lift off ○ Inconsistent distances and low horizontal distance 2 ○ Able to hop on one leg from start to end with medium distance hops 3 ○ Some successful splashing at target 4 ○ Consistent and coordinated aiming 5 ○ Completely leaves the bottom of the pool or wall

Kicking (Front)



Jumping



Hand-Eye Coordination



Set up:

- Use a kick-board or pool wall for support
- Position in shallow water where swimmer feels secure

Activity Instructions:

- **Younger:** Kick while holding the wall or kick-board, focus on making splashes
- **Experienced:** Kick with straight legs from the hips, try kicking while holding a streamlined position

To increase or decrease difficulty:

- Adjust speed: slow, medium, fast kicks
- Try pushing off the wall and kicking into a short swim

Find at home Physical Activity Bank suggestions for this skill under "Kicking" on KidsAction.ca

Set up:

- Choose a safe, shallow area of the pool
- Ensure instructor/spotter is close by for safety.

Activity Instructions:

- **Younger:** Step or slide carefully into the water, then practice small two-foot push-offs from the bottom of the pool.
- **Experienced:** Jump from the edge of the pool into shallow water with both feet together.

To increase or decrease difficulty:

- Add push-offs from the bottom before trying jumps from the edge.
- Try streamlined swimming strokes, or in deep water, dive in head first

Find at home Physical Activity Bank suggestions for this skill under "Jumping" on KidsAction.ca

Set up:

- Use shallow water in the pool
- Place a target (floating toy or paddle) a short distance away

Activity Instructions:

- **Younger:** Use two hands to push water toward the target
- **Experienced:** Try aiming splashes with one hand at a time, or alternate left/right

To increase or decrease difficulty:

- Start with a large, close target; progress to smaller or further away
- Try aiming at a moving target (floating toy drifting on the surface)

Find at home Physical Activity Bank suggestions for this skill under "Hand-Eye Coordination" on KidsAction.ca

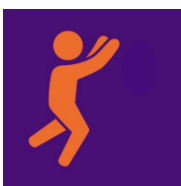
Hopping



Striking



Catching/Targeting



Set up:

- Shallow water area
- Use floor push-offs with feet together

Activity Instructions:

- **Younger:** Try small hops upward with arms out
- **Experienced:** Perform big frog jumps with arms swinging forward

To increase or decrease difficulty:

- Start with assisted two-foot pushes, progress to independent hops
- Vary height or distance of jumps
- Add sequence of multiple hops

Find at home Physical Activity Bank suggestions for this skill under "Hopping" on KidsAction.ca

Set up:

- Swimmer in shallow water or supported float
- Use kick-board or noodle under chest if needed

Activity Instructions:

- **Younger:** Practice seal claps/splashes at surface
- **Experienced:** Perform sculling sweeps in prone or sitting float

To increase or decrease difficulty:

- Begin with large splashes, progress to flat-hand sweeps
- Adjust hand angle for more resistance
- Add travel across short distance

Find at home Physical Activity Bank suggestions for this skill under "Striking" on KidsAction.ca

Set up:

- Use floating toys on surface or sinking rings in shallow water
- Instructor scatters or drops items

Activity Instructions:

- **Younger:** Scoop toys with two hands, hug them to chest
- **Experienced:** Grab toys with one hand, collect multiple in a row

To increase or decrease difficulty:

- Start with large floating toys and progress to smaller/sinking ones
- Vary distance and depth of toys

Find at home Physical Activity Bank suggestions for this skill under "Catching" on KidsAction.ca

Freestyle Reach Water Digger Scoop up toward the sky, then pull down to swim forward! Alternate arms, reaching up and over. - Arm push resembles a short forward shove - No hip movement involved - Minimal splash created - Multiple kicks in sequence - Some hip engagement but uneven rhythm - Alternates between bent and straight legs - Strong, efficient kicks from the hips - Legs remain straight and coordinated - Creates forward propulsion or sustained movement	Side Pull Otter Scoop Pretend you're an otter catching a fish. Sweep your arms out to the sides in a big circle! - Arms push straight only - No elbow bend and outward scoop - Poor timing in movement - Moderate scoops with both arms - Some outward-inward movement - Elbows bend inconsistently - Strong, consistent scoops outward and inward - Smooth symmetrical arm action	Pushing off the wall Rocket Blast Off Pretend you're a rocket blasting off the pool wall! Push with your feet and glide forward. - Feet slip on wall - Weak push - No gliding - Pushes off with some force - Partial streamline, arms uneven - Glide is short but stable - Explosive push-off with full streamline - Body stable, able to glide a few meters
November 2025  Face in water Bubble Blower Pretend you're a fish blowing bubbles! Put your face in the water and breathe out slowly. - Refuses or unable to put face in water - Only splashes with hands. - Submerges mouth and nose - Blows bubbles inconsistently - Face fully submerged with control - Rhythmic breathing, exhales bubbles in water, inhales above water November 2025 	November 2025  Underwater Skills Deep diver Pretend you're a diver going underwater to find treasure! - Hesitant to put head under water - Only splashes face or dips chin - Full head under water for short time - Eyes open briefly, holds breath inconsistently - Confident underwater submersion - Holds breath with control, can retrieve toys or objects from pool bottom November 2025 	November 2025  Entry/Exit of Water Diving Penguin Pretend you're a penguin sliding off the ice into the ocean! Entering and exit the water safely. - Needs assistance or a life jacket - Only comfortable in shallow water - Hesitant stepping in, relies on rail/instructor support - Able to jump into deep water and return to the wall/edge - Can perform a kneeling dive into deep water - Shows improving confidence and body control - Performs advanced entries: standing dive, stride entry, or forward roll/somersault - Maintains controlled body position and safe surfacing November 2025 

Freestyle Reach



Side Pull



Pushing off the wall



Set up:

- Use shallow water or pool edge for practice
- Swimmers can stand or float with a kick-board

Activity Instructions:

- **Younger:** Practice big rainbow arms over the head while standing in shallow water, one at a time
- **Experienced:** Perform alternating arm strokes while kicking or gliding, focus on smooth overhead recovery and forward reach

To increase or decrease difficulty:

- Begin on deck ("dryland rainbows"), then progress to shallow water, then to swimming with kick support
- Increase distance and tempo once form is smooth

Find at home Physical Activity Bank suggestions for this skill under "Overhand Throw" on KidsAction.ca

Set up:

- Shallow water or pool edge for demonstration
- Swimmer supported with kick-board or noodle if needed

Activity Instructions:

- **Younger:** Practice "big otter scoops" standing in shallow water
- **Experienced:** Perform scoops in horizontal float with kick support

To increase or decrease difficulty:

- Begin standing; progress to floating with support
- Vary size of scoops (small □ big)
- Add breathing timing as skill improves

Find at home Physical Activity Bank suggestions for this skill under "Underhand Throw" on KidsAction.ca

Set up:

- Swimmer at pool wall in shallow/deep end
- Instructor nearby for safety

Activity Instructions:

- **Younger:** Push gently from wall with two feet, glide a short distance
- **Experienced:** Perform strong streamline push-offs with arms overhead

To increase or decrease difficulty:

- Start with knees bent, hands apart; progress to full streamline
- Add challenge with distance goals (e.g., glide to a marker)
- Incorporate into stroke starts

Find at home Physical Activity Bank suggestions on KidsAction.ca

Entry/Exit of Water



Underwater Skills



Face in water



Set up:

- Pool edge, steps, or ladder for practicing safe exits
- Deep and shallow areas as appropriate to swimmer level

Activity Instructions:

- **Younger:** Practice safe entries with support (sit and slide in, step in holding the rail). Exit by climbing out using wall, steps, or ladder. Pretend you are penguins climbing on/off the ice.
- **Experienced:** Progress to stride entries and forward rolls (somersaults) into deep water.

To increase or decrease difficulty:

- Begin with sit-and-slide entries using support.
- Progress to independent jumps and kneeling dives.
- Advance to stride entries or forward roll (somersault) entries.

Find at home Physical Activity Bank suggestions on KidsAction.ca

Set up:

- Shallow water with toys/objects at easy reach
- Instructor demonstrates dipping and surfacing calmly

Activity Instructions:

- **Younger:** Practice quick dips ("peek-a-boo under the water")
- **Experienced:** Fully submerge, hold breath, open eyes, and retrieve an object

To increase or decrease difficulty:

- Begin with short dips and progress to longer submersions
- Start with eyes closed and progress to eyes open

Find at home Physical Activity Bank suggestions on KidsAction.ca

Set up:

- Shallow water or pool edge
- Instructor models blowing bubbles first

Activity Instructions:

- **Younger:** Lean forward, dip mouth in, practice gentle bubble blowing
- **Experienced:** Fully submerge face, practice rhythm: blow bubbles, lift head, breathe in

To increase or decrease difficulty:

- Start with just lips in water, then nose, then full face
- Add goggles for comfort, then progress to without
- Progress from short bubble bursts to longer, steady exhalations

Find at home Physical Activity Bank suggestions on KidsAction.ca

Treading water

Paddling Puppy

Pretend you're a puppy keeping your head above the water while paddling your paws!

1	○ Uses a life jacket or support, able to tread for 30s ○ Choppy arm and leg movements, struggles to keep ears above water ○ Needs frequent breaks or reassurance
2	○ Treads water without a life jacket for 30s– 1min
3	○ Movements becoming more coordinated, better balance
4	○ Beginning to maintain position without drifting
5	○ Treads water independently for 1–2+ min without support ○ Smooth, efficient arm and leg coordination ○ Maintains upright position without drifting

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Floating (Orientation)

Flipping Fish

Pretend you're a fish that can flip over in the water. Float calmly keeping your body steady!

1	○ Needs assistance to change positions ○ Hesitant to place face in water ○ Relies on instructor support for rolling
2	○ Floats on back, then attempts front float with buoyant aid
3	○ Beginning to control body orientation
4	○ Can hold each position briefly with support
5	○ Floats on back and front without support ○ Rolls smoothly between positions ○

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Floating (Body Position)

Floating Starfish

Pretend you're a starfish resting on your back in the ocean filling your belly with air!

1	○ Floats on back with assistance, body is stiff ○ Often Kicks or splashes to stay upright ○ Needs help staying calm and balanced
2	○ Floats on back with buoyant aid (noodle, board)
3	○ Starting to relax and trust the water ○ Hold position briefly without panic
4	○ Floats on back without support
5	○ Relaxed body and steady breathing ○ Arms and legs spread, calm and confident

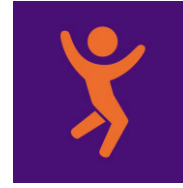
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Treading water



Floating (Orientation)



Floating (Body Position)



Set up:

- Deep water area where swimmer cannot touch the bottom
- Life jackets or buoyant aids available for beginners

Activity Instructions:

- **Younger:** Pretend you're a puppy pedaling your paws. Keep your chin above water and take short breaks holding the wall
- **Experienced:** Use legs like a bicycle and arms in small circles to stay upright. Try treading without drifting for 30–60 seconds

To increase or decrease difficulty:

- Start with life jacket or instructor support
- Progress to short intervals without support
- Increase time goal and maintain position without drifting

Find at home Physical Activity Bank suggestions on KidsAction.ca

Set up:

- Shallow to chest-depth water
- Buoyant aids for beginners with instructor spotting

Activity Instructions:

- **Younger:** Float on back with support, then gently roll to the side like a fish turning.
- **Experienced:** Float on back, roll to front calmly, and hold both positions independently.

To increase or decrease difficulty:

- Begin with supported rolling and practice with buoyant aid
- Progress to independent back-to-front rolls

Find at home Physical Activity Bank suggestions on KidsAction.ca

Set up:

- Shallow to chest-depth water
- Buoyant aids for beginners with instructor spotting

Activity Instructions:

- **Younger:** Use a noodle across your chest and be a starfish resting on the water.
- **Experienced:** Float on back without aids, arms and legs wide, breathing calmly.

To increase or decrease difficulty:

- Try adding or removing a buoyant aid (noodle or float) to decrease or increase support.
- Try changing the water depth or asking the swimmer to hold the float for shorter or longer periods to adjust difficulty.

Find at home Physical Activity Bank suggestions on KidsAction.ca