

Action & Fitness

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P120

THE SCORCHING SUMMER ISSUE

SIZZLING SWIMSUIT YEAR

TURN YOUR KID INTO A WATERBABY

HOW DO THEY DO IT?
ISSA LITTON & JINNO RUFINO TELL US HOW

Wii WILL ROCK YOU!

5 LOW-CAL MEALS

RACE THE DRAGONBOAT

GET SUPERFAST LEGS

BURN FAT, GET TAN

BEEF UP THAT SKINNY BOD

10 TO TRAINING TOOLS

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Child's Play

Making swimming fun

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PHOTOS BY NYKKO SANTOS

It's every parent's summertime nightmare. One moment you're with the kids at the beach or at the pool, the little toddlers splashing around and having a great time. With just one lapse of your attention, a glance at the cellphone, a word with someone else, and suddenly your child is floundering for his life. An innocent vacation suddenly turns into a mortifying, and at worst traumatic, chapter in life.

Enter Coach Ria Mackay of Aqualogic Swim Company, who brought the Total Immersion (TI) swimming method to the Philippines several years ago. For adults, TI is a way to get comfortable with the water, to master the freestyle stroke, and possibly to get faster for competitions. But for concerned parents and their water-loving children, it's a way to get them comfortable with the concept of swimming, and it can save their lives. For parents with pools in their homes,

for example, a common fear is of a child falling in by accident. In this case, one of TI's lessons is to teach a toddler how to paddle back to the wall. It's a simple enough concept, but surprisingly difficult to master for those who commonly panic once surrounded by water.

"Swimming is as important as learning how to walk," says Ria. TI is a swimming technique that helps the body move faster by gliding in a streamlined manner. While adults turn to TI to help them swim better whether for sport or recreation, parents are also turning to TI to teach their kids how to become water babies through innovative methods such as toys, songs, and games disguised as drills.

In their swimming lessons for children, Coach Ria helps her students conquer their fear of the pool. She says the pool would seem as big as the ocean, especially for toddlers who

are used to the bath tub. Teaching for 17 years already, she is fully aware that some kids may have some emotional baggage from their previous experiences, such as with accidents or harsh trainers. "They have to be comfortable first and we have to gain their trust. Their association with the water *parating masama dahil sa bad experiences na yun*", she says. "It's a bonus that we're being paid for what we do. It's all about helping a child or an adult to love the water, and carrying that love until you grow old," she adds.

Her summer program for children aims to teach safety in a fun way. "We want to keep it interesting and playful, but not to the point that they aren't learning anything from it. Even if we are using all of these colorful toys, songs, and games, it's still structured," she says. She summed the program into three words: safety, comfort, and fun.

"We make it appear it's like a game but it's a safety skill. Automatic na 'pag napagod sila, they'll go on their back. It's all like practical skills. We don't teach them how to doggie paddle. They're just pushing water back but they are actually standing up. The momentum is not moving forward. What we encourage them to do is be in the right position," says Ria.

Coach Ria and other instructors make sure that the students master first how their body moves in the water before they start introducing strokes and freestyle movement. "It's all about efficiency. If you're efficient in water, you don't exert too much energy. Some people, by just looking at them in the water, you'll see that they're tired," she says.

It's common for parents to air concerns such as cleanliness of the pool, student-teacher ratio, the number of sessions, and "what if my child cries"? In their infant and children's classes, they don't go beyond six students per

The small number of students per class ensures their safety, keeping it manageable so instructors are always in control.

instructor. Ria is supported by three other teachers—Nonoy Basa, Dess Coral, and Bianca Lawas.

The small number of students per class ensures their safety, keeping it manageable so instructors are always in control. "Safety issue *din kung madami dahil hindi mo alam where they are*. We always make sure that they are safe," she says.

With her years in teaching, she's gotten used to problematic students. "If they are crying, I'll go to the middle of the pool and talk to them." She can recognize whether a child is really in pain or just protesting.

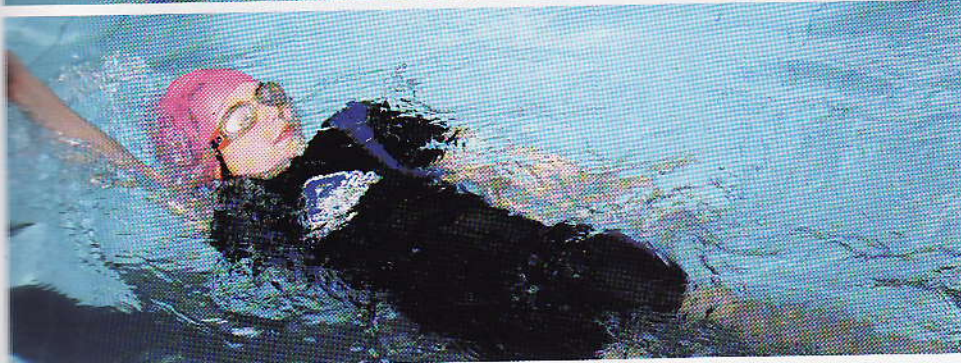
In their infant classes, they are encouraging parents to join their kids in the pool. However, she's aware of our *yaya* culture. Most of her weekday students are accompanied by their *yayas*. On the other hand, the expats are mostly hands-on parents. In a visit by this magazine at one of their weekend classes in Colegio San Agustin, the majority of the students were foreigners. She encourages parents to accompany their kids, as the sessions can serve as bonding time for the family.

The learning curve varies from child to child. Ria prepares the parents by saying, "You can't teach someone a skill that is exactly the same as the other person's if the other person is not ready. So, it's age-appropriate and developmental-appropriate."

She adds that a child's motor skills, coordination, and personality will also play key roles in their progress. She guarantees though that day one will be different from day eight. "It's gonna be a big leap from how they started out," she stresses.

Their swimming programs attract mainly students from the A and B brackets. "This generation is a logical thinker. They compare what's in the market, what's best for their child. When they hear about our approach, when they see us, then they understand the value. It was just a coincidence that we attract the AB market. They're the ones that appreciate what we teach," she says.

Priced at P5000-P5500 (depending on the venue) for eight sessions, their infant and children classes are relatively more expensive than traditional classes, which can go as low as P950 for ten sessions. While it may seem expensive, Coach Ria says it's due to the high price of their equipment and instructors' training, which come from the United States. "We also value the communication skills of our teachers. They're well versed and fluent in English," she says. The instructors continually undergo training in order to beef up their skills. ♦



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