

YOUR GUIDE TO A BALANCED LIFE

# WORKINGMOM

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It all begins with a welcome song to relax and gradually introduce the infants/toddlers to the water

# Little mermaids

Babies learn to be safe—and happy—in the pool

BY MARLA SILAYAN-GONZALEZ

This bright sunny afternoon, the usually calm and quiet pool of a Makati hotel gradually filled up with kids, some of whom were only 6 months old.

They were there to learn how to swim, with a teaching method far less traumatic than “throw them in and they’ll be forced to paddle.” Teacher Ria Mackay advocates

a fun, gradual approach that uses toys and games. Moms are part of the process, too. They hold their babies and slowly introduce them to the pool. As teacher Ria sings welcome songs, they pour water over various parts of their child’s body. The hair is the last thing they wet. It’s as comfortable and natural as giving them a bath.

As the session gets on its way and the babies get used to the water, Teacher Ria gently submerges them in the water—including their head. Some cry before their dip into the water, but they all emerge with big smiles on their faces. Then, Teacher Ria gently guides them back to Mommy.

Wow. Babies who were barely able to crawl and walk had learned to hold their



**Tip:** When bathing any baby younger than 9 months, count 1-10 and then gently

pour water over his head. Notice how he closes his eyes and holds his breath. Don't wipe away the water. This keeps his breath-holding skill active.



Toys can get kids to do anything and it's the same technique used in the Diaper Dolphin swim program.

breath under water. And they learned it without being traumatized.

### Specializing in "little swimmers"

Ria Mackay was introduced to swimming at an early age, and participated in competitions throughout her childhood. She gave informal swimming classes in 1992, but it was not until 2000 that she got into it professionally.

Ria looked for ways to hone her swimming and teaching skills. She came across two swim programs which are now the anchor of her organization, Aqua Logic Swim Company. She trained under Total Immersion which teaches swimming efficiency and an infant/toddler swim program called Diaper Dolphins.

Diaper Dolphins uses a gentle, sensitive approach. "Whatever age group we teach, comfort is number one. You have to be comfortable in the water," says Teacher Ria, who uses toys to get kids into a

relaxed, playful frame of mind. She has many loyal clients who sign up for the next program because they see how much fun their kids have. For example, four-year-old Mateo joined the program when he was 10 months old.

Ria believes in parent participation, especially if the child is just learning how to move around the pool. "This is a great bonding opportunity," she says. Participation includes carrying your child or catching them after submersion exercises.

### Swimming safety skills

The children are taught age-appropriate, life-saving skills. Babies from 6 to 14 months are taught how to hold their breath. "Up to the age of 6 months, babies automatically hold their breath when they feel water on their face. But between 6-9 months that reflex fades." So, Ria teaches them a cue given each time they are submerged.

The babies are taught to hold their breath for up to five seconds, which is just

long enough for a parent to reach a child case they accidentally fall in the pool.

Children 14 months old or above are taught a technique that can save their life if they fall into the water: when you fall, swim to the side. This is very crucial for anyone who has a pool in their home. After that skill, they are taught assisted back float.

Aside from Ria, Aqua Logic has a team of competent coaches who are there to assist her. Even the infant classes have a ratio of 6 students to one coach who is eager to ensure that everyone is enjoying and learning at the same time. Some of the parents were her former students who she taught to love the water. Despite her growing popularity, she says she wants to remain the head coach—teaching the kids themselves and making sure they learn and enjoy at the same time. **WM**

Aqua Logic has classes for everyone. For more information on their schedules and rates, please call 858-AQUA(2782) and [www.aqualogicswim.com](http://www.aqualogicswim.com).