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A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO SWIMMING AND MINDFULNESS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE SEEKING FOCUS, ENERGY, AND BALANCE

**The Benefits of Swimming and
Mindfulness on Adolescents and Young
Adults with ADHD**



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This Guidebook has been produced within the framework of the Erasmus+ project **Swim to Live 5**, which aims to help adolescents with ADHD through swimming and mindfulness techniques.

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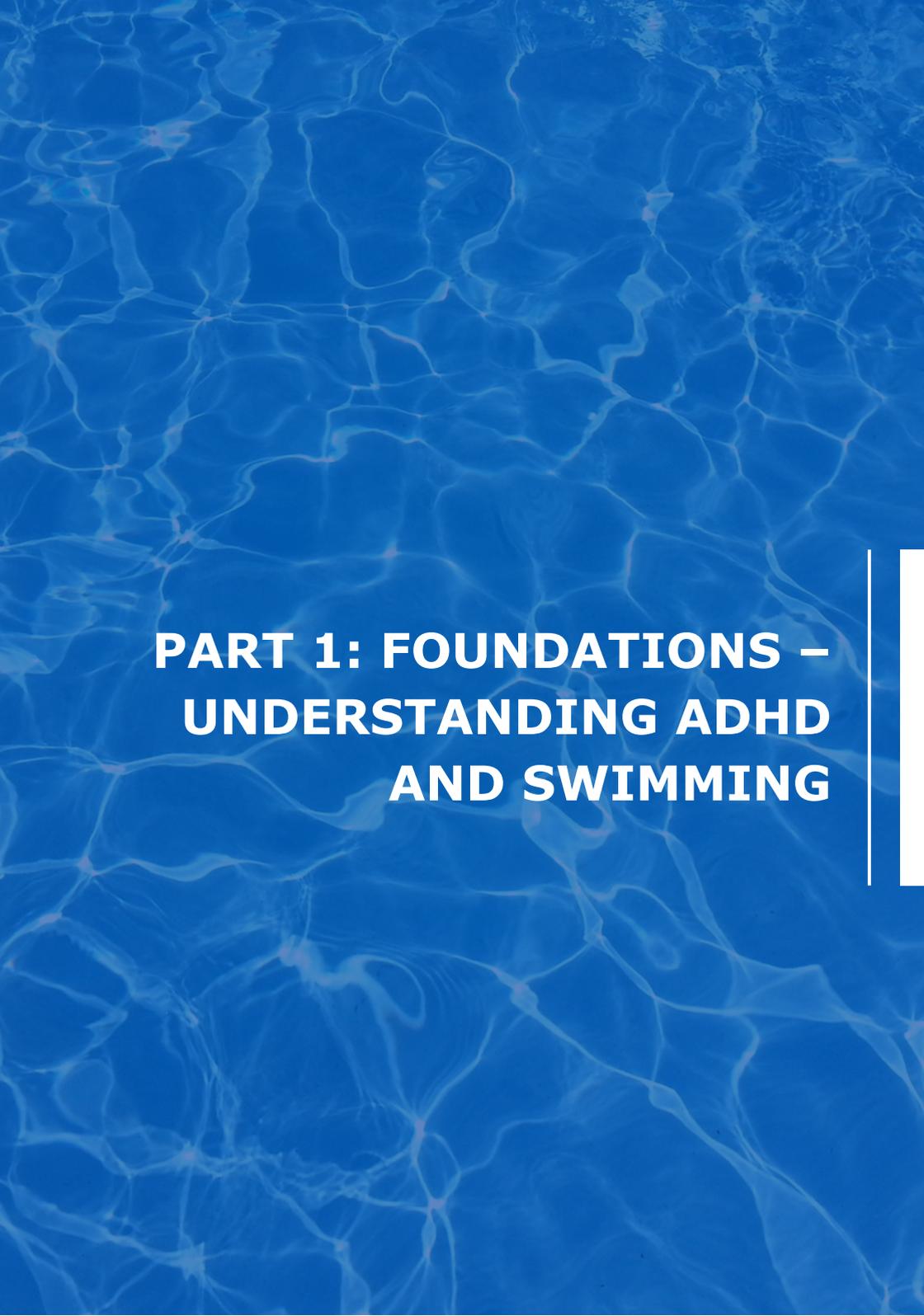
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**PART 1: FOUNDATIONS –
UNDERSTANDING ADHD
AND SWIMMING**

Part 1: Foundations – Understanding ADHD and Swimming

1.1 What is ADHD?

ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder) is a **neurodevelopmental disorder** that affects how a person pays attention, controls impulses, and manages activity levels, beginning in childhood and often continuing into adolescence and adulthood.

ADHD is typically divided into three presentations, based on the types of symptoms a person has:

1. Inattentive Presentation (formerly called ADD): difficulty focusing or paying attention to details, trouble following instructions or finishing tasks, easily distracted or forgetful, avoids tasks requiring sustained mental effort.

2. Hyperactive-Impulsive Presentation: fidgeting or inability to sit still, excessive talking or interrupting, impulsive decisions (acting without thinking), difficulty waiting their turn.

3. Combined Presentation: symptoms of both inattention and hyperactivity/impulsivity.

ADHD has **multiple contributing factors**. Genetic predisposition (which often runs in families), brain structure and function differences (especially in the prefrontal cortex and dopamine pathways), and environmental influences (e.g., early exposure to toxins, low birth weight, or prenatal stress).

It is not caused by poor parenting, diet, or excessive screen time, although these factors can influence how symptoms appear or are managed.

Traditional treatments include stimulant medications and cognitive behavioural therapy. However, many adults seek alternative approaches due to medication side effects, cost concerns, or personal preferences.

Physical exercise, particularly swimming, has emerged as a promising adjunct or alternative treatment (Mehren et al., 2019).

ADHD

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental condition that often persists into adulthood. In Europe, studies estimate that adult **ADHD affects approximately 2.5% to 4.7% of the population**, though prevalence rates can vary by country and diagnostic criteria. For instance, a study in Germany reported a prevalence of 4.7% among adults aged 18 to 64 years (de Zwaan, 2012).

1.2 Why Swimming Helps

Swimming combines aerobic exercise with rhythmic movements and controlled breathing, which may benefit individuals with ADHD. Research indicates that regular swimming can **improve attention, reduce hyperactivity, and enhance mood regulation** (Archer and Kostrzewa, 2012).

A study involving an adult with ADHD demonstrated that an eight-week swimming program significantly alleviated symptoms of inattention and hyperactivity (Skalidou et al, 2023).

- **Neuroscience: Dopamine, Focus, and Executive Function**

Swimming, as an aerobic exercise, has been shown to positively impact brain function, particularly in individuals with ADHD (Mehren et al., 2019).

Regular physical activity, like swimming, **can increase dopamine levels**. Dopamine plays a crucial role in attention and executive function. Engaging in physical activities such as swimming can elevate dopamine levels, which may help improve attention and reduce impulsivity in individuals with ADHD (Liwen et al., 2025).

It can also **enhance executive functions**: executive functions, including working memory, cognitive flexibility (Archer in Kostrzewa, 2012), and inhibitory control (Hattabi et al., 2022), are often impaired in individuals with ADHD.

Studies suggest that physical exercise can lead to improvements in these cognitive domains, thereby aiding in better self-regulation and decision-making (Benzing, 2018).

- **Emotional and Sensory Regulation Benefits**

Swimming offers unique sensory experiences that can aid in **emotional and sensory regulation**.

The tactile sensation of water, combined with the rhythmic and repetitive nature of swimming, offers **consistent sensory input** that can be especially helpful for young people with difficulties in attention and self-regulation.

The pressure and resistance of water engage the proprioceptive and tactile systems, helping to **calm the nervous system and improve focus**. This is particularly valuable for individuals with sensory processing challenges, which often overlap with traits seen in ADHD.

Research supports the **use of aquatic environments to promote sensory integration**, improving body awareness, reducing hyperactivity, and enhancing emotional regulation in children with attention difficulties (Schaefer & Drew, 2005).



Michael Phelps

Michael Phelps, the most decorated Olympian of all time, has openly discussed his experiences with ADHD. Diagnosed with ADHD at a young age, Phelps faced difficulties with attention and hyperactivity.

Phelps found that **swimming provided a structured environment where he could channel his energy positively**. The discipline and routine of swim training helped him manage his symptoms effectively (Murphy, 2024).

1.3 What is Mindfulness, and Why is it Important for Athletes With ADHD

“

Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally. – Kabat-Zinn, 1994

Constant awareness to body, emotions, objects of awareness (thoughts and perceptions), and awareness itself. – Wynne, 2007

”

Mindfulness is the practice of **paying attention on purpose, in the present moment**, and without judgment. It means deliberately focusing on what is happening in your body, mind, and surroundings, moment by moment.

Mindfulness is:

- An intentional awareness of experience as it unfolds.
- A way of becoming unstuck from automatic or reactive behaviour patterns.
- A method to observe thoughts, emotions, and sensations without trying to change them.
- A skill that can be learned and cultivated over time.

By increasing self-awareness, **mindfulness helps reduce unconscious behaviours** that are often driven by fear or insecurity. It invites people to return to the present, notice their internal experience, and act with greater clarity and calm.

The **positive effects** of mindfulness:

- Improves focus and attention.
- Enhances emotional regulation.
- Reduces impulsivity.
- Builds patience and resilience.
- Helps manage pre-competition anxiety.

By practising mindfulness, athletes can become more attuned to their body, breath, and emotions, leading to better performance and overall well-being.

1.4 How Mindfulness Affects the Brain

Calderone et al. (2024) highlight several key neurobiological effects of mindfulness and meditation in their systematic review:

- **Improved emotional regulation**, which contributes to reduced anxiety and depression.
- Structural changes in the brain, as regular mindfulness and meditation practices, are associated with increased cortical thickness and changes in areas such as the anterior cingulate cortex, prefrontal cortex, and insula, regions that are **essential for emotional processing and self-awareness**.
- Reduced amygdala activity, which **supports better stress management and emotional control**. Greater resilience to stress, underpinned by measurable neurobiological adaptations in the brain.

In summary, Mindfulness is not just a calming technique; it is a brain-training method with real, measurable effects.

**PART 2: TOOLS FOR
ATHLETES TO BUILD
SKILLS FOR FOCUS, FLOW,
& INDEPENDENCE**

Part 2: Tools for Athletes to Build Skills for Focus, Flow, & Independence

Athletes who experience difficulty with focus, emotional regulation, or routine may benefit from **tools that build structure and predictability** into their daily lives.

While natural talent and motivation are important, the **ability to organise time, self-regulate, and stay consistent** is what helps young athletes grow in sport and beyond it.

This section of the Guide introduces **practical tools for athletes**: routines, strategies, and exercises that support performance, reduce stress, and encourage independence.

These tools are especially helpful for athletes who experience challenges related to attention, impulsivity, or executive functioning, whether diagnosed or not.

Time blindness



Time blindness, a commonly reported phenomenon among individuals with ADHD, refers to **difficulties in perceiving and managing the passage of time**.

Individuals often struggle with time-related tasks, including accurately judging the duration of activities, adhering to schedules, and identifying the appropriate moments to begin or complete tasks. This difficulty is commonly linked to neurodevelopmental conditions such as ADHD and Autism Spectrum Disorder (Kreider, Medina and Slamka, 2019).

Time management



Time management is the ability to use one's time effectively or productively. These skills reduce stress and prioritise your time.

2.1 Strategies for Coping with Challenges Connected to Time Management

- **Habits and Routines**

Habits and routines refer to the **regular behaviours and patterns** that individuals engage in daily, offering consistency and organisation in their lives.

These practices support effective functioning across multiple areas, including education, work, daily responsibilities, and social interactions.

- **Reframing**

Participants employed the strategy of reframing to gain deeper insight into their difficulties with time management and productivity.

This approach involved **redefining stressful or disappointing experiences**, such as failing to complete a task or not meeting time-related expectations (either their own or others'), in a more constructive and understanding way.

• Symptom-specific Strategies

Symptom-specific strategies refer to the targeted methods participants used to **manage particular symptoms associated with ADHD**. These strategies helped them deal with difficulties such as sustaining attention, preserving cognitive energy, remembering important information, staying organised, and initiating tasks effectively (Kreider, Medina and Slamka, 2019).

This section introduces **simple tools that make daily training easier to manage**, from visual schedules to bedtime prep. These strategies can be adapted for different swimmers, training environments, and energy levels.

Which strategy should I use to cope with time management?



2.2 Tools for Athletes: Habits and Routines

Routines are powerful. They reduce decision fatigue, increase focus, and help athletes build consistency, especially when attention can wander or motivation dips.

We are sure that for young people, habits and routines are not restrictive; they can benefit from structure, and they are empowering.

1. Create Visual Schedules

A visual schedule helps athletes **keep track of their training**, recovery, and personal time in one place.

Purpose: Reduces forgetfulness and provides a calming sense of predictability.

Tips:

- Use a paper planner, a phone app, or a visible whiteboard.
- Include school, meals, naps, and swimming - not just workouts.
- Use colour coding or emojis for motivation.

Example Checklist for Swim Practice:

- Goggles.
- Swim cap.
- Towel.
- Water bottle and gel.
- Training equipment: snorkel, fins, paddles.
- Training journal.

Tools & Apps:

- Todolist or Trello (for digital checklists).
- Laminated checklist (tick with dry-erase marker).

2. Set Clear Deadlines & Use Timers

Assign **specific durations to each activity**. This keeps the athlete focused and reduces the mental load of figuring out “what comes next”.

Example:

- 10 minutes for warm-up
- 20 minutes for technique work
- Main set: time and level (e.g., high aerobic endurance, 25 min)
- 5-minute cooldown
- 15-minute post-practice drink, snack and journal.

Timers support transitions, help manage rest breaks, and reduce procrastination. You can combine timers with visual or audio signals (e.g., phone alarms or vibrating watches).

Tools & Apps:

- Google Calendar (time blocking).
- Focus Booster or Boosted (ADHD-friendly app).
- Pomodoro Timer: 25 min work + 5 min break.
- Analogue tools: a paper planner or a whiteboard.

3. Prioritise Tasks

Help athletes **learn to focus on what matters first**:

- Start with high-impact activities (e.g., technique drills, key stretches).
- Defer lower-priority tasks or save them for cooldown.

For bigger goals (like competition prep), break them down into small, daily or weekly steps.

Tip: Use numbers or colours to label priority levels (e.g., red = must do, blue = optional).

4. Prepare the Night Before

Evening prep sets the tone for a smoother morning. Build this habit into the routine with reminders or a calming ritual.

Suggestions:

- Pack swim bag (checklist again!).
- Lay out clothes.
- Review tomorrow's schedule.
- Set alarms or cues for wake-up time.
- Wind down with a short breathing or gratitude exercise.

2.3 Tools for Athletes: Reframing for Confidence and Progress

Success in sport isn't just about training harder; it is also about how you think about yourself, your goals, and your learning process.

Reframing means looking at challenges from a different angle and **building a mindset that helps you grow**.

This toolset helps athletes develop self-awareness, self-compassion, and motivation through small wins and positive feedback.

It is especially useful for those who struggle with confidence, frustration, or comparing themselves to others.

1. Know Your Strengths and Challenges

Understanding your abilities is the first step toward better focus and confidence.

Try this:

Make two simple lists: “1. Things I am good at”, and “2. Things I find challenging”.

Add to the lists regularly. Review them before training or competition to remind yourself of your growth.

Coach Tip: Reinforce that everyone, Olympic athletes included, has both strengths and areas to improve. The goal is not perfection, but awareness.

2. Know Your Learning Style

Different people learn in different ways. Identifying how you learn best can make training easier and more enjoyable.

Use the **VARK model** to explore what works for you:

- **Visual:** diagrams, colour-coded notes, videos
- **Auditory:** listening to instructions or talking through ideas
- **Read/Write:** lists, journals, reading training guides
- **Kinesthetic:** learning by doing, touching, moving, feeling.

Tip: Ask yourself after practice: “When did I feel most focused?”, “What made that drill stick for me?”.

3. Set Small Daily Goals

Big goals are exciting, but they can also feel overwhelming. Break them into tiny, meaningful actions that you can actually do today.

Examples:

- “Hold my streamline for 2 extra underwater kicks”.

- “Ask one question during practice”.
- “Remember to pack my water bottle”.

Why it works: Small goals build motivation and self-trust. When you complete them, you get a mental “win” that fuels further progress.

4. Accountability Systems

You don’t have to do this alone. Having someone by your side makes it easier to stay on track and feel supported.

Ideas:

- **Buddy system:** pair with a teammate for reminders, transitions, or tracking goals.
- **Coach check-ins:** share your goal with your coach before or after practice.
- **Reminders:** set alarms on your watch or phone for key tasks (e.g., “Time to stretch!” or “Review checklist”).

Even one small nudge or bit of encouragement can keep momentum going.

5. Symptom-specific strategies

- **Plan Recovery Time:** schedule downtime or relaxation between practices or events to prevent burnout and maintain energy levels.
- **Switch Activities:** when you begin to feel bored or lose focus, switch to a different activity to maintain interest.
- **Manage Low-Level Stress:** if possible, choose environments where you can work in peace. If a situation becomes too stressful, step away temporarily. Once you've calmed down, return and continue your work.

A high-angle, top-down view of a swimmer in a pool lane. The swimmer is wearing a white swimsuit and a blue and red swim cap, and is captured mid-stroke, creating a splash of white water. Two black lane lines with yellow floats run parallel to each other, framing the swimmer. The water is a deep, clear blue. The overall image has a blue color cast. A white vertical bar is on the right side of the page.

PART 3: TOOLS FOR COACHES TO DESIGN TRAINING SESSIONS

Part 3: Tools for Coaches to Design Training Sessions

In this section, you will find a **sample session structure**, from warm-up to cool-down, designed to support focus, learning, and enjoyment.

Each phase includes practical coaching tips, swimmer-friendly analogies, and routines that **help swimmers stay engaged and regulated**.

We encourage coaches to **use simple analogies** when explaining tasks. They not only make instructions more fun, but also help swimmers understand and remember movements more effectively.

Let your voice, creativity, and empathy guide the session; **your coaching style matters**.

Designing Training Sessions



A **well-designed training session** helps swimmers feel safe, focused, and engaged.

Structure is especially important for young people who need more help transitioning between tasks or regulating energy and attention.

3.1 Session Phases Overview

Phase	Time	Purpose
Warm-Up	10–15 min	Activate the body and mind, set a calm tone.
Main Part	20–25 min	Focused skill development: drills, sets.
Play Phase	10–15 min	Reinforce learning through fun and connection.
Cool-Down	5–10 min	Transition to calm, stretch, reflect.

Warm-Up (10–15 min)

Purpose: Wake up the body and settle the mind before entering the pool.

Out of Water (5 min)

Activities:

- Dynamic stretches: arm circles, leg swings, shoulder rolls.
- Light cardio: jogging in place or jumping jacks (if space allows).
- Breathing exercises: box breathing or breathing observation (check the mindfulness part).

In Water (5–10 min)

Activities:

- Walking/jogging in water (forwards, sideways, backwards).
- Feel of the water: push and pull against resistance.
- Short easy swims: freestyle, backstroke, breaststroke, depending on the group.

Analogies for the coach:

- “Draw rainbows with your arms”.
- “Move like you're walking through thick mud”.
- “Feel the water pushing back”.

Coach Script: Warm-Up Phase (Out of Water + In Water)

[Out of Water – 5 minutes]

“Alright team, let’s start easy and wake up our bodies. No rush - we’re just warming up”.

“Now swing your legs. Front to back. Like you're kicking through water already. Just let them move easily”.

“Shoulders now. Gentle rolls, forward... and back. If you want to yawn or shake out your hands, that’s good too. Just loosen up”.

“Okay - let’s bring our heart rate up just a bit. 30 seconds of light jumping jacks or jogging on the spot. You pick. Let’s go!”.

Wait, encourage quietly, count with them if needed.

“Nice! Now let’s calm the breath. Put one hand on your belly”.

“Breathe in slowly through your nose... hold... now out through your mouth. Like you're blowing out through a straw”.

“Let’s do that three more times. Feel your belly rise... and fall...”.

Pause to model and let them follow.

“Well done. Who’s ready to move into the water?”.

[In Water – 5–10 minutes]

“Let’s start with a walk across the pool - forward, then sideways, then backwards. Pretend you’re walking through mud. Feel the push of the water”.

“Now push the water with your hands - front and back. Nice and slow. Like you’re moving soup in a big pot”.



Watch the video to discover more

<https://youtu.be/r5sTUefnzCg>



“Okay, pick your favourite stroke and do one relaxed length. This is not about speed. Just move easily and smoothly”.

[Wrap-Up of Warm-Up]

“Great job warming up. Your bodies are ready, and so is your brain. Let’s keep this feeling of calm focus into the next part”.

Main Part (20–25 min)

Focus on **one or two skills per session**.

Keep **instructions short, concrete, and repeated if needed**.

Build in rest and reflection between drills.

- **Drill 1 (5–10 min):**

Focus: Axial rotation using the trunk. Add challenge: “Turn slow, then a little faster, then slow again”.

Watch how the swimmer rotates the whole body like one solid barrel, hips and shoulders turn together.

The movement is slow, controlled, and led from the centre, not just the arms.



Watch the video to discover more

<https://youtu.be/pBRiEnqd1-8>



• Drill 2 (5–10 min):

Focus: Freestyle + rotation.

Task: 4 strokes of freestyle with straight arms, then rotate on the back.

The swimmer begins in a streamlined push-off from the wall. They perform 4 freestyle strokes with extended, straight arms, emphasizing reach and rhythm. After the fourth stroke, the swimmer rotates smoothly onto their back, gliding with arms extended.

Notice how the swimmer keeps their arms straight and long, slicing through the water like windmill blades. After four strokes, they rotate in one smooth motion onto their back, hips and shoulders turning together.

Challenge: Use visual markers to swim with fewer strokes across the pool.



Watch the video to discover more

<https://youtu.be/2PckM-5S500>



• Favourite Swimming Drills

In this video, we showcase two effective swimming drills designed to enhance technique and water feel.

Drill 1 – Freestyle: Swim 2 strokes with the left arm, 2 with the right, then full-stroke freestyle. This drill helps improve balance, coordination, and feel for the water.

Drill 2 – Breaststroke: Perform one-arm strokes with two kicks. This exercise focuses on timing, efficiency, and stroke control.



Watch the video to discover more

https://youtu.be/-TbhGAH7g_c



Add a challenge: count your kicks in 30 seconds and measure how far you can swim.

Quick check-in after each drill:

“How did that feel?”

“Thumbs up/down?”

“What did you notice?”

Analogies for the coach:

- **Rotation:** “Spin like a big barrel, don’t break into little pieces. Stay strong and steady as one whole shape”.
- **Kicking:** “Kick like you're whipping cream” or “Like a dolphin tail, long and quick”.
- **Arms:** “Like windmill blades, smooth and strong”.

Play Phase (10–15 min)

Games reinforce movement patterns and social interaction while reducing pressure.

They also help regulate energy levels before the cooldown.

Example Games:

- **Treasure Hunt:** Toss sinking toys, swimmers dive and retrieve them.
- **Relay Race:** Short sprints with high-fives at each turn.



Watch the video to discover more

<https://youtu.be/pBRiEnqd1-8>



- **Shark in the Circle:** All players stand in a circle in shallow water, **holding hands**. One person in the circle has a **pool noodle (or other floating toy)** balanced on their shoulder - **they are the Target**. Outside the circle swims or runs the **Shark**, who tries to tag the Target.

The players in the circle **must move together and protect the Target** without breaking their linked hands. The Shark must be clever and quick to tag the Target by reaching through gaps or catching them exposed.



Watch the videos to discover more

<https://youtu.be/IcpfPp3qxHU>



- **The sinking boats:**

Setup: A line of floating, sinking boards (like pads or planks) is placed across a pool or lake. Each one dips underwater when someone steps on it.

The Challenge: You run across them as quickly as possible, before they sink too deep to hold you.

The Trick: If you hesitate, the board sinks and pulls you into the water. If you are fast, you can bounce from one sinking board to the next.

Winning Goal: Cross all the boards to the other side without falling in, or see how many you can cross before you sink.

Game Style: It is a test of speed, agility, and balance, but it's also hilarious because most people end up splashing into the water.



Watch the videos to discover more

<https://youtu.be/0CwjMj6I9ZE>



Games are part of learning; use them in the middle or end, not just as a reward.

Cool-Down (5–10 min)

Slow the body down and help swimmers reflect on the session. This supports **recovery and emotional regulation**.

Activities:

- 50m slow swim (any stroke).
- Deep breathing while floating (“Starfish float”).



Watch the video to discover more

[https://www.youtube.com/shorts/
PJsIJwY_7wI?feature=share](https://www.youtube.com/shorts/PJsIJwY_7wI?feature=share)



- Group body scan or gentle stretches
- Coach feedback circle: “What was your favorite part?”.

Analogies for the coach:

- “Melt into the water to let your muscles relax”.
- “Float like a starfish sleeping on its back”.

Tip: Show them a video of a relaxed animal swimming, to show what calm and controlled movement looks like.

3.2 Dressing Room Routines & Transitions

Pre-Session

- Post a visual schedule (whiteboard or printout).
- Remind: goggles, swim cap, towel.
- Follow the same entry routine every time.



Watch the video to discover more

<https://youtu.be/nYtmqYzuypI>



Post-Session

- Use a 5-minute timer for changing: “We meet outside in 5 minutes”.
- Repeat exit routines - clean, calm, predictable.
- Ask: “What was your favourite part today?”.

For example:

“Before we go, I want to hear from you. What was your favourite part today?”.

(Pause and wait, give space for different types of answers: a game, a drill, something funny, or even just ‘being in the water’.)

“Thanks for sharing. It helps me learn what you enjoy, and it helps you remember what you’re good at”.

“You all did something great today. Let’s carry that feeling with us until next time”.



Practical Coaching Tips for Every Session

- Keep **time blocks short** (10–15 minutes max per activity).
- Use **colored cones or visual toys** to mark lanes or targets.
- **Give swimmers choices** when possible: warm-up style, favourite stretch, game. **But!** If the group is large or unsettled, the coach chooses tasks and gives clear directions.
- Give **positive feedback often and specifically** (e.g., “Your streamline was super smooth today!”).
- Focus feedback on **one thing at a time**.
- At the end of the session, **be generous with praise**, even for small wins.

3.3 Practical Mindfulness Exercises, Tips and Instructions

This section offers **simple, body-based mindfulness practices** that support focus, regulation, and emotional balance, both in and out of the water.

The exercises are designed to fit naturally into swim training, stretching routines, or moments of quiet reflection.

You will find:

- Breathing exercises to calm the nervous system,
- Body scan techniques to improve self-awareness,
- Stretching practices that build sensory focus,
- And water-based mindfulness drills that use movement, flow, and buoyancy as anchors for attention.

Each practice is presented with **clear instructions, tips, and coach-ready scripts**, making it easy to integrate into daily sessions.

Whether you are working with beginners or experienced swimmers, these tools help build mental clarity, self-regulation, and a deeper connection to the body and environment.

Mindfulness



Mindfulness doesn't require silence or stillness; it simply asks us to **pay attention**, kindly and curiously.

1. Breathing

Focus: Building calm and focus through breath awareness.

What to do: Pay attention to your belly as it rises and falls with each breath. Notice the length of your inhale and exhale, and the natural rhythm your body follows.

Tip: Go slow and stay gentle. Place a hand on your belly to feel the movement. Try silent counting (e.g., “1-2-3”) to help pace your breath.

There is no need to change your breath, just observe it as it is.

Coach Script: Mindful Breathing – Belly Focus

“Let’s take a moment to check in with our breath”.

“Place one or both hands gently on your belly. Just notice how it moves when you breathe”.

“We are not changing anything yet, just observing. Feel the rise and fall under your hand”.

“Now slowly breathe in through your nose... and out through your nose”.

“Let’s do that again. Inhale... (pause 3 seconds)... and exhale... (pause 3 seconds)”.

“Try to feel the rhythm. Is your inhale as long as your exhale? Can you make them even?”.

“If it helps, you can count silently in your head. Try: ‘One... two... three...’ as you breathe in, and the same as you breathe out”.

“Go slow. Be gentle with your breath. No need to force it. If your mind wanders, that’s okay. Just bring your attention back to the feeling of your belly moving”.

“Let’s do two more breaths together. Inhale... and exhale... One more, nice and slow”.

“Now, just notice how you feel. Calm? More focused? Ready to move on”.

2. Body Scan

Focus: Developing body awareness through gentle attention.

What to do: Guide your attention through your body, part by part, noticing sensations without judgment. This practice helps swimmers recognize tension, connect with their body, and feel grounded.

Tip: Go slowly. You don’t need to feel something in every body part, just notice what’s there. Focus on raw sensations like warmth, heaviness, tingling, or even stillness.

Coach Script: Body Scan

1. Breath Awareness - “Lie down comfortably and close your eyes if you’d like. Take a moment to notice your breathing; no need to change it. Just observe the natural rhythm of the inhale and exhale. Feel your body being supported by the surface beneath you”.

2. Feet - “Bring your attention to your feet. Start with your toes, notice any sensations there. Move to the soles, arches, and heels. Notice the contact they make with the surface. Are they warm, cool, light, or heavy?”.

3. Ankles and Lower Legs - “Now shift your focus to your ankles. Feel the joints, any tightness or ease? Move up to your shins and calves. Notice any sensations like pressure, pulsing, or temperature differences”.

4. Knees and Thighs - “Bring your awareness to your knees. Notice how they feel without judgment, are they relaxed or tense? Now move to your thighs. Can you sense the muscles in the front and back? Just observe”.

5. Hips and Pelvis - “Now, tune into your hips. Are both sides resting evenly on the surface? Bring your awareness to your pelvis. Sense its position and any feeling of weight or openness in the area”.

6. Abdomen and Lower Back - “Shift your focus to your belly. Feel it rise and fall gently with your breath. Is it soft or holding tension? Now bring your attention to your lower back, notice the curve and any sensation of contact or support”.

7. Chest and Upper Back - “Now feel your chest. Notice the movement of your breath here. Bring awareness to your ribs and the space between your shoulder blades. Is there any tightness or spaciousness?”.

8. Shoulders and Arms - “Let your attention move to your shoulders. Are they lifted or relaxed? Bring your awareness down your arms, through your elbows, wrists, all the way to your fingertips. Notice their weight, temperature, and contact with the surface”.

9. Neck and Jaw - “Now focus on your neck. Notice if you’re holding tension there. Shift to your jaw. Is it clenched or soft? If needed, let it release slightly”.

10. Face and Head - “Bring your attention to your face, your cheeks, eyes, and forehead. Can you soften the muscles here? Let that softness extend to your scalp and the crown of your head”.

11. Full Body Integration - “Now bring your awareness to your entire body, connected and supported. Feel the breath flowing from head to toe. Stay here for a few breaths, noticing the overall sense of presence in your body”.



Tips

- It is normal for your mind to **wander**; just gently return to the part of the body being scanned.
- There is **no “right” way to feel**, just notice whatever is present without judgment.
- Tune into **raw sensations** (warmth, tingling, heaviness, numbness) rather than trying to fix or interpret them.

- If you feel nothing in a certain area, that's okay, just **notice the absence** too.
- If you feel distracted or tense, **gently bring attention back** to your breathing.
- Try to **sync your awareness** of each body part with the natural rhythm of your breath.
- Don't try to relax or feel a certain way, just **notice what is**.
- Benefits (like relaxation, reduced pain, or awareness) often come naturally with **regular practice**.

3. Mindful Stretching

Focus: Increasing body awareness by paying close attention to movement, balance, and how each part of the body feels, before, during, and after the stretch.

What to do: While stretching, tune in to the **sensations in your limbs, joints, and muscles**. Notice **symmetry**: does one side feel tighter or more open than the other? After each stretch, pause and observe the **after-feeling** in your body.

Tip: Break it down. Focus on **one area at a time**, like shoulders, hips, or ankles. Slow, deliberate movements help the brain register what's happening in the body.

Coach Script: Mindful Stretching

“Let’s slow things down and take a few moments to check in with our bodies while we stretch. We’re not just doing this to loosen up; we’re also noticing how our body feels right now”.

1. Neck and Shoulders - “Start by gently rolling your shoulders back... and forward. Feel the movement. Notice if one side feels tighter than the other”.

“Now slowly tilt your head side to side. Let it hang gently for a breath or two. Just notice the stretch, not forcing it”.

2. Arms and Wrists - “Stretch one arm across your chest, hold it with the other. Feel the pull through the shoulder. Switch sides”.

“Now circle your wrists, feel the joints moving. Maybe they crack a little. That’s okay”.

3. Hips and Legs - “Place one ankle over your opposite knee and gently lower into a hip stretch. Notice the balance in your body. Are both sides even?”.

“Now stretch one leg forward, reach toward your toes. What do you feel? A stretch? Warmth? Anything is fine, just notice”.

4. Pause and Feel - “Stand or sit still for a moment. How does your body feel now compared to before? Can you feel warmth in your muscles? Any tingling or release?”.

“This is the ‘after-feeling’ - just let yourself notice it”.

Closing Cue:

“Nice work. Stretching mindfully isn’t about going further; it’s about paying attention”.

“Let’s carry that awareness with us into the next part of training”.

4. Mindfulness in the Water

Focus: Connecting with the body, breath, and sensations while swimming or floating.

What to do: Swim slowly or float while paying close attention to how your body moves, how the water feels on your skin, and how your breathing flows.

This practice helps swimmers feel calm, grounded, and more aware of how they move through water.

Tip: Go at your own pace. Mindfulness in the water means being present with your movements, breath, and sensations.

It is not about swimming faster; it is about noticing more.

Let the **sensation of the water** guide your awareness.

Stay curious and kind with whatever you feel.

Beginners

Start with **breathing combinations**: explore how you inhale and exhale, how fast or slow you breathe out, and how it changes your body's rhythm in the water.

Tip 1: Try buoyancy exercises and gentle axial rotations to feel how water supports and resists your body.

TIP 2: Focus only on yourself. Let the exhale continue until after your face leaves the water; don't rush it.

Advanced Swimmers

Bring **attention to both physical and emotional sensations in the water**.

Notice how speed changes pressure and flow.

Use your skin and body surface to sense resistance and guide your technique.

TIP: Use somatosensory information (like pressure on your limbs or skin) to check your body's position and alignment.

- **Mindfulness in Water: Feeling the Water's Pressure and Flow**

When we pay attention to how water feels on our skin, we begin to swim with more presence and awareness.

Inspired by the Nelms Method, this practice encourages swimmers to **notice the pressure of water against the body**, the gentle pull as arms move through it, and the way movement creates flow and resistance.

By focusing on sensations rather than speed, **swimmers learn to feel connected to the water, regulate their breathing, and quiet their minds.**

It is not just about swimming; it is about tuning in.

Try this during warm-up or cool-down.

Move slowly, with full attention. Notice how the water holds you. Feel the resistance as you push through.

Let your mind follow the movement.



Watch the video to discover more

https://youtu.be/_Un8elcQqZk



- **Mindfulness in Water: Breathing Awareness and the Nelms Method**

One of the simplest ways to introduce mindfulness in swimming is through breathing control exercises that draw attention to the sensation of water, breath, and the body's response.

Inspired by the Nelms Method, "**crocodile breathing**" involves floating with the face near the surface, gently opening the mouth to allow a small amount of water in.

This light contact with water stimulates the trigeminal and vagus nerves, which play a key role in relaxation and nervous system regulation.

Swimmers learn to **stay calm while feeling water** at the lips and around the face, remaining relaxed while breathing steadily through the mouth or nose, without inhaling water.

This practice helps swimmers become more comfortable with water on the face and more aware of their breath, **creating a calm, grounded state** ideal for both training and recovery.



Watch the video to discover more

<https://youtu.be/s2EwJkritho>



• **Breathing Control: Sitting on the Pool Bottom**

This exercise develops breath awareness, body control, and calmness underwater.

Swimmers **practice exhaling gradually to regulate their buoyancy** and descend in a controlled way to a seated position on the bottom of the pool.

Instructions:

- Begin by floating upright near the wall or in a safe, shallow area.
- Take a calm breath in.
- Slowly exhale while allowing the body to sink.
- The goal is to control the breath just enough to gently reach a **sitting position** on the pool floor.
- Once seated, stay relaxed for 1–3 seconds before returning to the surface.

Tips:

- Focus on the feeling of air leaving the body and how it affects your position in the water.
- Don't force yourself down; let go slowly.
- This exercise helps develop a stronger sense of body awareness and breathing rhythm.

Safety Note: Always practice under supervision. Avoid holding your breath for extended periods underwater.



Watch the video to discover more

<https://youtu.be/71XRyTetUlw>



Conclusion

This Guidebook brought together knowledge, experience, and practical tools to support young people with attention-related challenges in and around the water.

We hope the content inspires coaches, professionals, and athletes to create more inclusive, structured, and mindful environments.

The positive outcomes of our pilot study show that **regular swimming, mindfulness, and time-management routines can significantly improve well-being and focus.**

We would like to express our sincere thanks to all participants, coaches, researchers, and partner organizations who made this project possible. Your dedication, curiosity, and openness helped us turn ideas into meaningful impact.

Visit the Project Website:

<https://swimtolive.org/>



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