Floating Guide

**Introduction**

Floating is most likely the first water skill we all learnt when learning how to swim, making it appropriate that this would be the first clinic in our series (so no prerequisites whatsoever). There are a couple reasons why floating is important, and I’ll list the ones that I think are most applicable to myself, you are more than welcome to find your own reasoning, I find it helpful if one knows why we teach what we teach and not just how to teach what we teach. For myself, I find floating to be a practice of identifying the center of buoyancy, learning to relax the body and not fight the water, and becoming comfortable in the water. Body position, being relaxed, trusting the body in the water; these are all aspects of the sport that will make it easier to learn how to swim as we progress into freestyle, backstroke, and so forth. In this guide, I’ll cover ways to help someone overcome their fear of the water through floating, different types of floats, ways to practice floating, and the general progression from fully assisted to no help at all.

**Part I – Overcoming the Fear of Water**

As floating is the first skill we learn, there is very likely chance that you’ll get someone who has no experience with the water at all. You must first remember that signing up for classes and getting in the water is the most difficult thing for one to overcome when they are learning to swim. Them taking the initiative is already a huge step forward. Our goal is to help them continue along this path, with floats being their introduction to the water. This means that we must make floats the easiest transition from comfort on land to comfort in the water. To achieve this, we should look at ways to ease a participant into trusting the water and their body to float. This can be done through use of equipment like noodles or the float belts, and through constant reassurance. I like to ensure that a participant always knows what I am doing when I’m interacting with them; this could include stuff like telling them what we’re going to do when floating, how I’ll help them float up, and that they have no reason to worry cause I’m right next to them. It also helps to tell them to breathe normally and take deep breaths. A vast majority forget to breathe and not having enough oxygen in the body will cause it to start to sink, ensuring that there is a constant cycle of oxygen in the body ensures that it stays afloat and that there is air in the lungs; it also controls the heart rate which will help participants to relax their body and learn to trust it and the water. I would say constant communication and reassurance are the key to helping someone overcome their fear, and perhaps also explaining why we need to learn how to float may provide additional reassurance.

**Part II – Methods**

Okay, we’ve discussed how to talk to someone, great! Now for the more difficult part, trying to float. For this part, I would employ the use of equipment such as noodles to aid and something for them to feel supported. We have two types of general floats, back and front. For most, learning to float on the back first is the easiest as their face isn’t in the water which may throw some people off, it also helps to keep breathing. However, you may have selected individuals who prefer the front as they are able to see the bottom of the pool. So demonstrate both and see which ones an individual may want to learn first.

To help someone float, visualization might by helpful here. I like to focus on my center of buoyancy: lower back and core. To do this, imagine that a crane is lifting you up from your center of buoyancy. Raise your body from your core and imagine that you are being held up by the crane from the center. You may have a different method for helping to float and that’s ok, communicate with your participants ways to help them learn how to float.

Back floats

For this float, have a noodle around the center of buoyancy, about the core and lower back. To assist, gently raise the participant by their lower back where the noodle is placed until they’re fully horizontal. Remember to keep talking during this process with your hand always on their lower back for support. Once they’ve reached the fully flat position, make sure they’re nice and comfortable, and begin slowly taking away your hand till they’re fully supporting themselves and floating. For those not as comfortable in the water, use two hands and take one away at a time while constantly reassuring the participant. Two noodles may also be used for additional support.

When a participant is comfortable floating with a noodle, try floating without the noodle. This can be done by using the same method above, however, in addition to taking away your hands, remove the noodle too. With body position, ensure that their head, neck, and spine are in one line with their eyes looking straight up. Legs may drop and that’s totally normal considering the legs may be slightly heavier than the upper body but try to use the visualization previously mentioned to help raise the body as a whole.

Front floats

Floating on the front is a little more complicated for a couple of reasons: 1) the face is in the water, which may be uncomfortable for some, and 2) oxygen isn’t constantly cycled, making it harder to float. To counteract these complications, we tend to do front floats in short doses, holding the position till the body begins to drop due to lack of oxygen. It is possible to hold front floats for longer periods of time, turning your head to breathe in order to keep the cycle going; this may be slightly difficult for those new to the idea of swimming and is therefore not encouraged. For more experienced swimmers, you are more than welcome to have them try it out.

Similarly to the back floats, you want to try and assist a participant with floating on their front. This could be in the form of giving them noodles or other types of floatation devices, or perhaps helping them into the initial position to give them the feel of floating on their front. You may use your hands to support, however, ensure you have the participant’s consent and have thoroughly explained what you would be doing to them float; some people may find it uncomfortable for someone to touch them on their front but have no problems with hands on the back, so constant communication on what you are doing will help reassure them that there is nothing to worry about and there is a clear understanding on the purpose behind your intentions. Keep in mind that the purpose of floats is to act as an introduction to the water and you are merely there to assist and introduce.

Practicing Floating

We are now familiar with the idea of floating with assistance and eventually progressing onto floating without assistance. To practice floats, encourage participants to try using the wall for leverage or lowering themselves as if they were lying down onto their bed. As time goes on, they will start to feel a lot more comfortable in the water and begin getting used to controlling their body.

**Part III – Additional Floats**

Alongside the front and back float, we have additional floats that help to lay the groundwork for skills needed later on in a participants progression path.

* Pancake flips (front to back, back to front)

Pancake flips (as we call them to keep it fun for the kids) are generally utilized to instill the idea of using momentum to move your body, as in a pancake flip, the idea is to flip onto your other side while floating. Say you started with a back float; you would then use one of your arms to throw your body in a way that causes it to flip over onto your front.