

## ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION IN WATER SPORTS

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procedure.

# INCLUSIVE AQUATIC SPORTS: MODIFICATIONS FOR OPEN WATER



Implementing simple modifications in open water sports settings ensures full participation and safety for young children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH).

Swim teachers, coaches and life savers should consider integrating these practices as standard procedure.

**1. Visual Start/End Signals:** Utilize visual cues to initiate and conclude races. Consider using a coloured torch light to indicate "GO". If this is unavailable, a clear, decisive raised and lowered arm signal serves as an effective alternative. This system directly addresses the auditory limitations of DHH children.

**2. Visual Referee Signals:** Referees must employ consistent visual signals to capture an child's attention during competition. This includes the use of flags or clear, exaggerated gestures such as waving to indicate decisions or instructions.

**3. Direct Physical Cues for Attention:** Direct physical contact, such as a gentle tap on the shoulder, is an appropriate and universally accepted method for gaining the attention of a DHH child or team captain when verbal communication is impractical (e.g., during play stoppages or rule clarifications). Encourage all staff to use this tactics.

**4. Prominent Visual Scoring:** Ensure all scoring is communicated via highly visible

**5. Dedicated Explanation Time:** When play is stopped, provide a brief, dedicated moment (a few extra seconds) to visually explain the referee's decisions or instructions directly to the DHH child. This ensures comprehension of game flow and rules, even when hearing peers have already processed auditory cues.

## Managing Hearing Technology During Aquatic Activities

**Device Removal and Storage:** After conveying all necessary safety instructions, ensure the child's hearing devices are removed and immediately stored in a secure, dry location. As children mature, instruct them in this self-management practice. Note: Specific waterproof accessories are available for many cochlear implants; confirm with parents/carers regarding their use.

**Safety Rule Reinforcement:** DHH children may not fully perceive auditory safety instructions or incidental warnings from others. Consistently and frequently reinforce all water safety rules through visual means.

**Visual Communication & Attention:** Instruct the child to regularly scan for visual cues from educators, peers, and lifeguards. Establish and practice specific safety hand signals with the child if they do not use formal sign language.

**Lifeguard Briefing:** Inform lifeguards of the child's deafness. Explain that the child may exhibit delayed responses to auditory signals (e.g., whistles) and may require visual cues or direct hand signals for attention.

**Visual Identification:** Dress the child in bright, easily distinguishable colours. This enhances visibility, particularly in crowded pool or beach environments, aiding in direct supervision.

**Ear Protection & Drying:** If the child is prone to ear infections, ensure they wear earplugs during water activities. Thoroughly dry the child's ears before re-applying any hearing devices post-activity.

These tactics promote communication, social interaction, and engagement for all children, including those who are DHH. When selecting activities, prioritize visual cues and make necessary environmental adjustments.

**Environmental Adjustments:** Ensure good lighting for clear visual communication and lip-reading.

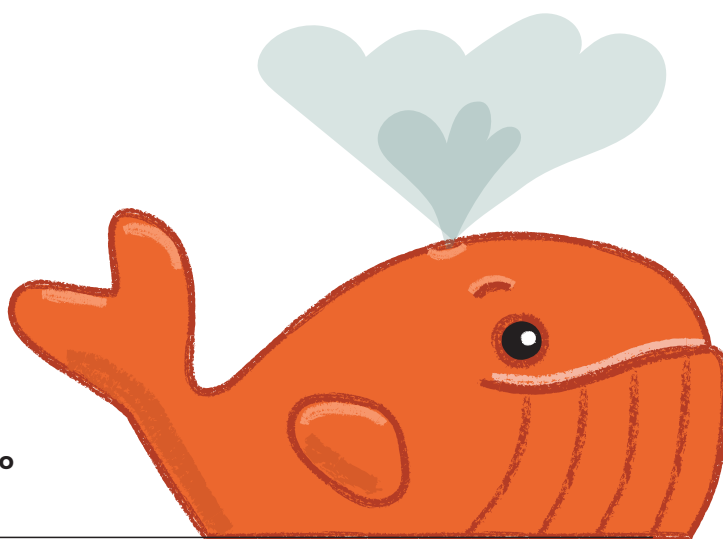
Arrange group activities in a circle to facilitate visual access to all participants and the educator.

Minimize background noise whenever feasible to reduce auditory distraction.

**Activity Focus:** Select games that inherently incorporate visual instructions, demonstrated actions, and opportunities for non-verbal interaction.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Open Water isn't just for swim schools. If you offer activities or programs on the beach for children or young people, we'd love to have you on our side!



For further information about  
Deaf Children Australia.  
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Deaf Children Australia uses the term 'deaf' to refer to all degrees and types of hearing loss.  
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**puggles**

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