

My Child Is Terrified Of Water In The Nose

“Put water up her nose? You’ve got to be kidding!”

If you’ve been trying to force your child to calmly accept your partial drowning of her as a solution to a stuffy nose, forget it, you’ve already lost the game. First, sit back and relax, and take a deep cleansing breathe. Now, print this off and go fix a nice cup of tea and sit quietly somewhere to read. Okay now, today we start over.

The first premise is to understand that survival is a basic instinct, so it is not just squirrely behavior that makes a child scream, flail and panic at the perception that she is a potential drowning victim. And an intelligent child stores that memory and quickly retrieves it in a similar situation, responding immediately and appropriately – as in removing herself from the danger: climbing forcefully from the tub, hitting, biting, screaming, and taking out all potential bathers in the process.

That said, it becomes your job, as the parent, to teach your child appropriate water conduct and water safety. At home, the operative word is water play. If you have a child who is terrified of the water, place a secure mat in the tub, and begin by allowing her to stand on the mat in a couple of inches of water, bathing her gently. Run warm water in the tub and turn it off before you even take her in the bathroom. The loud sound is frightening to some sensitive children. Assure her that from now on she may just stand in the tub while you wipe her down with a wet cloth. That’s all. New rules. Put some tub toys to float in the water. Over a matter of weeks, slowly raise the depth of the water to her mid shin. If you make no threats, odds are the floating toys will garner enough interest she will begin to reach for them, squat to float them on the water, perhaps sit. Add a doll, boats, whatever will pull in your child’s interest. Once you have your child sitting in the shallow water at play, MAKE NO COMMENT. Treat it as a non event. NEVER, NEVER, EVER say, “See, there is nothing to be afraid of.” That simply reminds the child of her fear, and makes her begin to worry again that maybe she was right.

Slowly now, when washing her, begin to drizzle a bit of water on her skin playfully, from the tip of the washcloth. See if you get away with it. If so, over the week ahead, drizzle a bit more. Then try pouring a dab from a colorful plastic cup onto her leg. Next week, onto her arm. The idea is to acclimate her and desensitize her until she is used to having water touching her, splashing on her, eventually being in her face, without it setting off a panic attack in her little body.

Understand this will take time and patience. You have to move slowly with these hypersensitive children, but the results are amazing, and well worth the effort. Once you have her past her extreme fear of water, link on to the ideas for two and three year olds for ideas on how to start her toward saline nose washes. Remember, there is no big rush. She’ll have her nose her entire life. If you can manage to turn this around and instill in her a lack of fear, and teach her how to wash her nose by the time she is two or three years older than she is now, think how amazing a change that will make in the rest of her life!

As always, be well,

Dr. Hana