

10-22-2018

How to Help People Float

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Recommended Citation

Andrews, Andrea B.Sc., M.Sc. (2018) "How to Help People Float," *International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education*: Vol. 11: No. 2, Article 20.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25035/ijare.11.02.20>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/ijare/vol11/iss2/20>

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How to Help People Float

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This presentation looked at how to help more people learn to float because this skill is taking a much more central role in the latest drowning prevention advice in the UK. Many people such as the BBC radio two show presenter, Simon Mayo, who in 2017 declared that he ‘cannot float’ because despite having been an alternative activity in many traditional swimming lessons, it is not a straight-forward skill for all to master and it requires a high degree of personal trust to have developed inside the water.

In this presentation, I discussed what learning to float fundamentally entails based upon recent publications from the neuroscience of emotion and insights from my own experience in the water with learners of all ages. I explored why very buoyant individuals can find floating as hard to perform as those who feel like sinkers before suggesting a few simple and reliable ways to gain deeper personal insight into how to help.

I believe that one of the reasons there is a lack of more widespread flotation skill in the population is due to the limited form of visually-based definitions that pervades aquatic culture and beyond. Floating is more dynamic than the iconic image of someone breathing serenely on their back which can become a blunt tool of self-judgment. A serene back float does represent a pinnacle of flotation skill and is a ready visual indicator of the resilient emotional basis of calling oneself a swimmer but there are myriad forms of embodied flotation that lead up to this point and support its maintenance.

I suggest that flotation is primarily based upon an internal skill of emotional coherence requiring ‘stationary’ periods of underwater embodiment and much calmer approaches in our learner pools.